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Wednesday, 21 June 2017, 10.20 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Soliz	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Guegen
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Bitimov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	Ukraine	Mr. Herasymenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mrs. Carrión

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2017/508)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2017/508)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Spain and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/508, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: The months since my most recent briefing (see S/PV.7896) have been unusually tense in Afghanistan. The deteriorating security situation has brought to the surface underlying political tensions. At the same time, the willingness of the Government to take steps towards peace was demonstrated by its successful holding in Kabul of a meeting on regional peace and security earlier this month, as well as the continuous implementation of the political agreement with the former insurgent group Hizb-i Islami (Gulbuddin). But without enhanced efforts by the National Unity Government to increase political inclusiveness, strengthen accountability and improve the Government's credibility, particularly in the security sector, we are likely to face more crises in an increasingly fragile environment. The events of the early morning of 20 June, when the Government's attempt to remove the final protesters resulted in violence, is a reminder of the need for caution, calm and unity.

The most recent security and political crisis was sparked by a terrorist bombing in Kabul's centre on 31 May. That was followed by large street demonstrations protesting growing insecurity that turned violent, followed by a suicide attack at the funeral of one of those killed in the demonstrations. Chief Executive Abdullah, Foreign Minister Rabbani and other senior political officials were near the blasts at the funeral but were thankfully unhurt. The political fault lines that emerged are increasingly ethnic-based, which is particularly worrying at a time when the Islamic State is attempting to provoke sectarian strife in the country through attacks against Shia Muslims.

During the anti-Government demonstrations on 2 June, we at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) conducted extensive outreach to leaders on all sides, particularly leaders of political movements who were considering joining the protests. We urged for restraint, warned of the negative consequences that the loss of control would entail for everyone and requested them to give time to allow their grievances to be addressed without violence. Coupled with the intensive efforts by the Government and members of the diplomatic community, the immediate risk of escalation was defused. We are grateful for the subsequent acknowledgement from the Government and political leaders outside the Government that UNAMA's efforts contributed to calming the situation. I remain concerned, however, that, without changes in governance practices, we are likely to face future crises that might be more difficult to contain.

What is the root of the problem? There have been indications, since last summer, that Afghanistan's broad political consensus is fraying. In recent months, a growing number of political factions, some of whom were formerly part of the National Unity Government as well as a younger generation of political forces, has begun to criticize and demand reforms be made to the Government. They argue that it is not sufficiently consultative or inclusive. The Government, on the other hand, claims that opposition groups block important reforms and stoke tensions by calling for the Government to be replaced. Each side accuses

the other of acting against the national interests. It appears to me undeniable that those perceptions have contributed to the tensions that characterize today's political environment. The existence of opposition is natural in any political scene, but the amount of mistrust is growing, while some increasingly resort to uncompromising slogans and statements capable of fuelling further violent protests. Efforts at inclusiveness and building consensus for political stability are critical.

The suicide bomb of 31 May exploded just outside the restricted diplomatic enclave in the middle of Kabul. It took more than 90 lives and injured approximately 500 people — all of whom were Afghans. While there were no serious international casualties, a number of diplomatic facilities, including several United Nations buildings, were badly damaged. Some Embassies have had to evacuate staff while their facilities are repaired. Despite those realities, it is imperative that the attack not be allowed to undermine international support for Afghanistan, including development and economic assistance. The international community must not be intimidated nor succumb to the terrorists.

The Government's ability to hold a high-level meeting of the Kabul process on regional peace and security in Kabul on 6 June, with the participation of 24 States and organizations, demonstrated its resilience and the determination of the international community to maintain its support for Afghanistan and the National Unity Government. In his opening speech President Ghani Ahmadzai stated,

> "We are gathered in this conference because the world community signed a promise that terrorism would not be tolerated, and today we are demanding that the world make good on this promise."

In that regard, I welcome the General Assembly's endorsement of the Secretary-General's proposal to create a new office on counter-terrorism headed by an Under-Secretary-General.

The Afghan vision for peace is premised on the fact that a stable Afghanistan would lead to a stable and more prosperous region. Achieving that vision will require the strong determination of all the States concerned, particularly of the region and the neighbourhood. The Afghan Government requested at the Kabul conference that the international community address this issue in all its facets. The nexus of crime, corruption and terrorism eventually undermines all States and the State system, which is why States must unite to combat it. The proof of our commitment will be a stable Afghanistan.

On the Afghan side, the recent series of security incidents has demonstrated the urgent need for reforms in the security sector. I welcome the Government's commitment to transparent, merit-based appointments and credible investigations into the events of 31 May, 2 and 3 June and 20 June, and other reforms in the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence.

Afghanistan faces numerous internal challenges in addition to fighting an insurgency that seems to be gaining ground. They include deep-rooted political tension, the difficulty of socially and economically reintegrating the thousands of Afghan refugees who return each day, an economy that is only very slowly recovering after the international drawdown in 2014, and pervasive corruption. The economy remains heavily dependent on development assistance. The private sector, as the biggest potential provider of employment, suffers from a lack of investor confidence and pervasive corruption. As a result, economic growth can neither match population growth nor generate enough employment for the many young Afghans entering the labour market every year. Corruption undermines the legitimacy of the State. It prevents a real economy from emerging. It contributes to insecurity. Corruption is at the heart of the problem of impunity, which itself is at the heart of the ongoing human rights challenges. Afghans alone are not to blame, but the consequences of corruption disproportionately affect Afghanistan.

In April, UNAMA issued its first comprehensive report on corruption in Afghanistan. I was gratified by the intensity of the public's response to the report. Afghans understand the effects of corruption and impunity because they face them every day. The National Unity Government has taken positive steps to tackle this problem by. Reforms that have begun to work in the Ministry of Defence are now being applied to the Ministry of Interior. The Anti-Corruption Justice Centre is proving to be an effective instrument.

With regard to human rights, UNAMA remains committed to provide credible data of the impact of the conflict of civilians, especially women and children. It continues to engage with all the main parties to the conflict to support them in taking measures to limit harm against civilians. UNAMA's report on the treatment of conflict detainees for the period 2015 and 2016 was published in April to coincide with the second

periodic review of Afghanistan by the United Nations Committee against Torture. UNAMA welcomes the Government's renewed commitment to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and to take further steps to eliminate the torture and ill-treatment of detainees. Those efforts must be accelerated to increase accountability and public trust in the Government.

The attack of 31 May and the events that followed should serve as a clarifying moment. We are at a point where we need to take conscious decisions to reverse negative trends and seek stability, or face far worse. The recent crisis has illustrated the dangers of pushing narrow interests, be they domestic or international, in Afghanistan's fragile context. There are two specific issues in particular that we must focus on.

First, in the domestic sphere, preparations must be accelerated for the next round of elections, both parliamentary and presidential. Decisions must be made regarding the use of technology and the role and modalities of international electoral assistance. Work must start on voter registration. The electoral calendar must be made clear. From my discussions with Afghan political actors, especially outside of Kabul, it is clear that the lack of clarity on those issues is a major component of the growing political mistrust. We understand that the Independent Election Commission will make an announcement as early as tomorrow regarding the date for parliamentary elections. I believe that announcement will contribute to allaying the political tensions I have referred to in this briefing.

Secondly, as I have repeatedly stated in this forum and elsewhere, a genuine peace process with the Taliban is essential and urgent. In the 6 June Kabul meeting, the need for a modus vivendi between Afghanistan and its neighbours was stressed. At the same time, I encourage the people of Afghanistan to begin an internal dialogue on the meaning of peace and reconciliation. The Government and the Taliban need to engage directly with each other to define a political solution. In that regard, the appointment of the new Chair of the High Peace Council is a welcome development, but it is only a first step towards the Council's revitalization and its new role in driving the peace process.

UNAMA is doing all it can to help contain political tensions, using its long-standing relationships and experience. I have been tremendously proud of the entire Mission and country team for those efforts. I was honoured to welcome the Secretary-General to Afghanistan last week, where his visit clearly demonstrated his and the Organization's commitment to Afghanistan, solidarity with its people and perseverance in the pursuit of peace.

We also look forward to the results of the strategic review that the Council has requested. We are hopeful and confident that it will ensure that we have the tools to continue to work for peace in Afghanistan. On the eve of the important Muslim holiday of Eid, I wish to reiterate my call for unity and to urge restraint, so that families and communities can enjoy a peaceful end of Ramadan.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President on Bolivia's assumption of the Security Council's presidency in June. We thank you for convening today's open debate on the situation in Afghanistan to take stock of the overall situation in our country. I am pleased by the presence of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Yamamoto. We thank him for the comprehensive briefing.

We meet at a time when Afghanistan is undergoing another phase in its test to overcome adversity. Much has happened since the Council's deliberations on Afghanistan in March (see S/PV.7896). I will focus my remarks on some of the most pressing issues of my country's security and stability, as well as regional and international cooperation.

After almost four decades of imposed conflict, with hundreds of thousands of casualties and millions of displaced people — I emphasize millions of displaced people — our country remains under almost constant attack. Earlier this year, thanks to the effective measures taken by our security forces and their pre-emptive strikes, the so-called Taliban spring offensive came later than expected and was dealt heavy blows in different parts of the country. Unable to confront our forces directly, the orchestrators of our insecurity resorted to desperate urban terrorist attacks on soft targets and attempts to sow discord among our people.

In recent months, we have seen attacks of an unprecedented nature across Afghanistan — on the streets, in hospitals, cemeteries, mosques, diplomatic missions and political institutions. Since the start of 2017, major terrorist attacks in urban centres have caused significant losses of lives and property — more than 500 killed and more than 1,100 wounded in Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif, Kandahar, Lashkar Gah, Khost and Herat. The most recent barbarous attack took place last week when worshippers were offering evening prayers in a Kabul mosque.

While all attacks are equally condemnable, the sheer carnage of the 31 May attack was unprecedented in its kind in the history of Afghanistan. The truck-bombing in the heart of Kabul was by all accounts a crime against humanity and Islamic values, spreading horror instead of peace and piety during the holy month of Ramadan. More than 150 innocent souls were lost, including women, children and some of our young journalists. Several disappeared, without a trace, from the impact of the explosion. In fact, this morning, I was watching a television programme showing a young mother and her children walking around town on the streets of Kabul looking for her husband and their father — not knowing what happened him. The nation was plunged into deep mourning. The attack reaffirmed the obvious — that the enemies of Afghanistan know no limit in their brutality to break our pride and prevent peace and stability from taking root in our society. Beyond the human tragedy, the local economy lost millions of dollars and several diplomatic missions suffered damages.

The attack triggered the culmination of social frustration and a wave of angry protests seeking security reform, which unfortunately has been leaving more death and injury in its wake, including a triple terrorist attack at one of the slain protester's funeral. We firmly believe in the constitutional right of our people to protest and know that, if the door of dialogue is shut down between the Government and protestors, violence will increase. No element of the Afghan security forces, supported by national and international taxpayers, should ever inflict unnecessary harm upon civilians. Given recent events, the commander of the Kabul garrison and the police chief have been suspended and the incidents are being investigated. We remain committed to reassuring our people that our security forces are there to protect all Afghans and are at their disposal and service. In short, what transpired on that dreadful Wednesday morning was an attack on our people, our democracy, our economy and our partnership with the international community.

While Afghanistan continues to bleed, we have witnessed increased terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom, France, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Mali, Russia, Sweden and Egypt — proving that terrorism has no boundaries and continues to threaten people everywhere. It is important that the civilized world, in its modern meaning, stand united in defiance of terror and secure peace and prosperity for current and future generations. We Afghans will do so in a spirit of national and global unity, which has enabled us to overcome difficult moments in our nation's life.

Reversing the tide against terror is contingent upon eliminating support centres beyond our frontiers that produce, nurture and empower terrorists operating in Afghanistan. The recently released outcome of a joint investigation by Afghanistan, the United Arab Emirates and the United States clearly establishes that the 10 January Kandahar attack was planned in Quetta, Pakistan. Similarly, early investigations verified the link between the Kabul truck bombing of 31 May and the Haqqani Network, based in Pakistan. A joint Afghan-German comprehensive investigation on the attack is currently under way. We shall release the outcome in due course.

The other external threat to Afghan sovereignty is the number of cross-frontier violations, which have increased dramatically — almost four-fold — since my presentation to the Council in March. Those violations, ranging from the firing of artillery shells, airspace violations and the construction of military posts and barriers to the digging of deep ditches — all of which exacerbate the current situation — if left unaddressed, will undoubtedly continue to undermine peace and security in our region.

In the Council, we have heard from a known neighbouring State that our Government "should not externalize its internal problems and blame others for its own failures." It is the same State that has been highly determined to do all it can to weaken and destabilize our country while accusing us of weakness. Let me remind everyone that those who would attribute Afghanistan's security and other challenges solely to internal issues are doing so to detract focus and attention from their long-standing policy of propagating violence and disorder in our country.

In dealing with the situation, we have been pursuing a three-pronged strategy: first, strengthening global counter-terrorism consensus with a focus on engaging Pakistan in genuine cooperation, ending cross-frontier violations and facilitating the peace process; secondly, strengthening our security and defensive capabilities; and, thirdly, improving national unity, governance and service-delivery to our people. Given the nature of the conflict, the success of our strategy depends upon collaborative and sustained work at national, regional and global levels.

Despite the enormous violence imposed on us over nearly four decades, especially this year, we remain firmly committed to the goal of sustaining peace. In that light, the 6 June Kabul process conference marked the resumption of an important initiative for stability in Afghanistan. The conference brought together regional countries, key international partners and relevant international institutions to focus on two imperatives: first, garnering a new level of commitment in support of our peace agenda and, secondly, identifying a common approach to end the cycle of terror and violence in the country.

We are pleased with the outcome of that conference, which reinstated cooperation mechanisms to promote peace and security. Naturally, Pakistan has an important role to play in ending violent extremism and promoting peace. We hope it will seize the opportunity for the benefit of its own citizens and stability in the region. Meeting on the margins of the recent Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit in Astana, President Ghani Ahmadzai and Prime Minister Sharif agreed to hold a bilateral working group meeting in Kabul in the near future on confronting terrorism. Moreover, we also look forward to additional discussion within the framework of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, with the participation of China and the United States.

Despite the difficult situation in the country, our security forces stand vigilant, protecting our people and infrastructure and preventing terrorists from capturing and establishing a presence in different provinces. They have responded robustly despite various logistical constraints in terms of resources, heavy weaponry and air capability. Let me pay tribute to the commitment and professionalism of those police officers who sacrificed their lives to prevent both the truck bomber of 31 May and last week's Kabul mosque attackers from reaching their intended targets and causing maximum casualties. The enemy is doing its best to stage so-called green-on-blue attacks in order to undermine international training programmes and support of our security forces. In addition, through selective targeting and the careful allocation of responsibility claims for terrorist attacks, the handlers of terrorism in the neighbourhood seek to create discord and distrust between our people and security forces. We will leave no room for any possible enemy infiltrators in our security forces.

The Government of National Unity is currently in the process of a national dialogue to strengthen consensus on relevant issues and address political grievances. We believe good governance can flourish only in an environment free of any particular ethnic or linguistic considerations. We will continue to focus on the greater task at hand — working towards economic self-sufficiency, tackling corruption and providing humanitarian relief for our people. Increasing economic development opportunities, with a focus on alleviating poverty and creating jobs, remains our key priority. Recent projects such as the Afghanistan-India air cargo corridor, the inauguration of public transport infrastructure in Kabul and the World Bank's $500 million financing for various development sector investments are few examples.

Today, the world faces an enemy united in its sole desire to bring death and destruction, dismantle State institutions and create chaos. Hence, it is imperative that the United Nations act decisively on its mandate, which is to maintain international peace and security. Last week, Secretary-General Guterres paid a visit to Kabul to express his solidarity with, and support for, the people and the Government of Afghanistan. That was a strong sign of his personal commitment to peace and security in our country, for which we are deeply grateful. In the broader context, his visit reaffirmed that the United Nations would remain beside us over the coming years as we continue our journey towards prosperity. We welcome the establishment of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and hope that its activities and mandate will help bring real and tangible change to counter-terrorism efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

In the past two years, we have reiterated time and again two key concerns for Afghanistan: first, concrete action against regional safe havens and logistical support to terrorists and ,secondly, cross-frontier violations, which I referred to before. On both issues, we have provided full briefings to the Secretary-General and the Security Council. The Council is yet

to take the necessary and appropriate action to address those two issues of concern. In our view, had it done so in the past, the situation would be different today. Another outstanding issue for the Council to act upon is the strict enforcement and strengthening of the sanctions regimes. Furthermore, the irreconcilable Taliban should be recognized as a terrorist group after its failure to engage meaningfully in the peace talks. The United Nations must also specify concrete criteria to clearly define State sponsorship of terrorism.

I take this opportunity to thank the Security Council for initiating a review of the structure, resources and activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. We consider it a necessary initiative for ensuring a more efficient and effective United Nations support role in the country. During the review process, we highlighted the imperative of the One United Nations initiative and an adjusted assistance role that would be in conformity with the principles of Afghan ownership and leadership, as well as the priority needs of Afghanistan. We wholeheartedly thank Under-Secretary-General Ján Kubiš for leading the review process in the most able manner, and the United Nations team on the ground for their contributions to the process.

In conclusion, despite all the challenges, our people are looking to the future with confidence. They have made enormous sacrifices thus far. As such, failure is not an option. That said, the support of the international community, including the Council, will be critically important for our success.

I would like to reiterate our gratitude for the Council's expression of firm support for the stability and prosperity of Afghanistan. Today, as we stand at a crossroads in our stabilization efforts, we look to the Security Council to help us overcome our security challenges by confronting the source of the ongoing conflict, and not by dealing with the consequences. In that connection, the need for an appropriate response by the Council to the task at hand cannot be overstated. We hope that that is realized so that our people are able to meet their basic aspirations of living in peace and security — free of terror, violence and destruction.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto for his informative and clear briefing.

I listened very carefully to our colleague Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal as he explained his views on the situation in his country.

I would like to begin by expressing Japan's deep condolences to the families of the victims of the terrorist attack that occurred on 31 May in Kabul, and deep regret for all acts of violence committed in the country since our last debate in March (see S/PV.7896). Such brutal attacks have deprived countless Afghans of their futures. They also crystallize our concerns about the deteriorating security situation noted in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/508). We are alarmed by the fact that it was not possible to prevent these appalling crimes from being conducted in the heart of the capital city.

In order to improve the security situation, the international community has continued to provide political support to the Government of Afghanistan, and financial support and training to the Afghan security sector. Unfortunately, we see little fundamental change in the security situation in Afghanistan.

More fundamentally, the seeming erosion of unity in the National Unity Government is profoundly concerning. The flare-up of political and ethnic tensions within the Government must be absolutely avoided given the enormity of the challenges Afghanistan faces. There need to be more effective measures for engaging with ethnic communities, which are underrepresented in the Government. The Government must return to its 2014 commitments, which underscored the necessity of equitable representation, with attention to inclusiveness and the unique political and societal composition of Afghanistan.

Also among the unmet commitments are the long-overdue parliamentary elections, which should have been held in 2015. We are aware that elections have the potential to worsen existing tensions and create new ones, leading to further fragmentation, as noted in the Secretary-General's report. However, continued delays are also problematic, and we urge the Afghan Government to demonstrate its commitment by announcing the timeline for parliamentary and district council elections. I was pleased to hear today from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in this Chamber that there may be an announcement

soon from the Afghan Government. The Government can make good use of the extensive United Nations experience in electoral support to ensure that the voices of Afghan voters are heard through the parliamentary and district council elections, as well as the 2019 presidential election.

The devastating terrorist attack on 31 May was a tragic wake-up call for Afghanistan and the international community to recognize the urgency of revitalizing the peace process. The Kabul process meeting on 6 June was a good opportunity for Afghanistan to show its strong commitment to making progress in the peace process with the support of international and regional partners. Japan emphasizes that the Government must not only express willingness, it must also deliver concrete results to the Afghan people. Support from regional and international stakeholders is also crucial. We therefore welcome the 10 June talks in Astana between Afghanistan and Pakistan, where they agreed to reinvigorate the Quadrilateral Coordination Group.

Japan is pleased to note positive efforts in the area of displacement. We have seen improved protection of civilians as well as coordination among Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In a recent informal meeting with Council members, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees noted improved Afghan Government efforts to absorb and integrate the dramatically increased number of returning refugees from neighbouring countries. We welcome the Secretary-General's visit to the internally displaced persons camp in Kabul on 14 June, which sent a very encouraging signal to some of the country's most desperate people. This visit underlines the necessity of international and United Nations support for the Afghan people's aspirations for peace and stability.

In these challenging circumstances, the implementation of resolution 2344 (2017), which mandated the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to support the people and the Government of Afghanistan in achieving peace and stability, is essential. We also await the results next month of the strategic review authorized by the resolution. We look forward to the Secretary-General's fresh inputs into the review following his visit to Kabul. Japan believes that the review must be an objective and impartial guideline for Council members in considering next steps. Once we have received the review, Japan, as the lead country on this file, will work with other Council members and stakeholders participating in today's debate to determine UNAMA's role in overcoming the difficult realities we currently face.

Mr. Bitimov (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamato, for his substantive briefing and for his commitment to the personnel of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which seeks to restore peace and security in Afghanistan, and for UNAMA's contribution to achieving that goal. We are also grateful to the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his statement. I know Mr. Saikal very well: he is an excellent political statesman in Kabul.

My delegation would like to share the following substantive considerations on the issue of the agenda before us. Since the previous report (S/2017/189), a number of major changes have taken place in the country at the political level. Kazakhstan welcomes intensification in the reporting period of the efforts of the Afghanistan Government to settle the internal political crisis and establish peace in the country. Proof of this, inter alia, is the return to Kabul of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the release of detainees of the Hizb-i Islami party, the holding, in complex conditions, of the international conference of the Kabul process on peace and security cooperation, on 6 June, and the recent meeting between Afghan President Ghani Ahmadzai and Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif in Astana as part of the Summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which gives hope for improved bilateral relations and new joint measures to combat terrorism.

We believe that the consultations on Afghanistan in various formats are important and necessary if the political differences are to be overcome and if joint efforts are to be made to facilitate the peace talks. Despite the open refusal of the Taliban to sit at the negotiating table with the Afghan Government, we need to continue to make efforts to find a peaceful solution, as no other alternative exists.

The situation in Afghanistan was the focus of the historic Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit in Astana on 8 and 9 June, where India and Pakistan became full-fledged members. We believe that, thanks to the accession of these two States to the SCO, the issue of tackling regional problems, including with regard to Afghanistan, will take place more dynamically. At the

same time, we note the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan. The latest series of major terrorist acts in the country means that whole international community must take more decisive steps to eradicate this scourge.

At the counter-terrorist level, Kazakhstan is troubled by the appearance of certain radical terror groups in the north of Afghanistan and notes, in that respect, the growing threat to the security of the Central Asian States. The situation of Afghanistan plays a special role in providing long-term stability and security for the whole region. In that regard, Kazakhstan comprehensively shares and supports the vision of Secretary General Guterres on bolstering preventive diplomacy. Just a few days ago, on 13 June, this issue was raised at the ministerial conference in Ashgabat. It was also raised during the Secretary-General's visit to Kabul on 15 June.

On the anti-narcotics front, we are concerned about the spread of opium poppy cultivation and the increase in drug production in Afghanistan. By some estimates, in 2016 drug dealers' total income in Afghanistan amounted to approximately $400 million. In our view, only joint efforts at the international and regional levels can achieve positive results in the fight against drug trafficking, which is a source of financing for terrorism.

One of the legacies of the ongoing armed conflict in Afghanistan is the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, in which the civilian population, especially its more vulnerable sectors, such as women, children and the elderly, is suffering and dying, while their homes and agricultural infrastructure are being ruined. We call for comprehensive steps to be taken to assist Afghanistan on the humanitarian front.

On the economic front, the continued critical condition of Afghanistan's socioeconomic sector is very worrying. Unfortunately, the measures that have been taken by the Government of Afghanistan and the international community are not enough. According to the experts, the main reason for the economic recession is the continuing lack of security, which is closely tied to development issues. In that regard, Kazakhstan has always believed that security and development are intertwined and should be promoted in parallel. With that in mind, we will continue to assist Afghanistan with development. Since 2008, Kazakhstan has donated approximately $100 million worth of aid, including free education for 1,000 Afghan students. At the Kazakhstan Government's expense, the road between Kunduz and Takhar has been repaved and a school in Dara Suf, in Samangan province, built, and a hospital in the Waras district of Bamyan province is being completed. In Samangan province, a number of bridges are being built over the Aybak River and its banks are being fortified.

In the light of all the issues I have mentioned, we would like to make the following recommendations. On the political front, the current international approaches to Afghanistan, including the position of the Security Council, should be reviewed with the aim of strengthening regional relationships with Afghanistan's neighbours, particularly in Central Asia. We should define a limited number of vital, high-priority tasks and put all the focus on solving them, without wasting energy and resources on lower-priority issues. As the principal United Nations body responsible for international peace and security, the Council should take regional interests into account while developing and adopting a clear, step-by-step plan for stabilizing Afghanistan, with the participation of the National Unity Government, that will outline the highest-priority tasks and the sequence and timing for dealing with them. Without this, and with a focus only on peacekeeping rhetoric, humanitarian assistance and donor infusions for the conflict-resolution process, it will be exceedingly difficult to achieve the goals of peace and stability for Afghanistan.

As a body specifically empowered by the Security Council and as an unbiased player, UNAMA's role in the intra-Afghan political settlement process should be enhanced. It should collaborate more actively with the National Unity Government in the interests of the Afghan people and all members of civil society working to help Afghanistan achieve national reconciliation and advance the peace process.

On the economic front, we must change perceptions of Afghanistan so that it is seen not as a threat, but as an important partner. In that regard, it is essential to help the Afghan economy integrate with those of the countries of Central Asia by implementing infrastructure, trade, investment and transit-transportation projects. In Almaty, which already hosts 18 regional and subregional United Nations offices, we should establish a regional centre for coordinating and directing the implementation of all activity aimed at promoting sustainable development, building economic capacity for countering terrorism and channelling cost-

effective humanitarian assistance from the Organization to Afghanistan.

On the anti-drug front, we should support the coordinated measures that are being undertaken by the Government of Afghanistan, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), INTERPOL and the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre for Combating the Illicit Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Their Precursors, as recommended at the sixth Steering Committee Meeting of the UNODC Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries, organized in Astana in April by the Government of Kazakhstan.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing and the courageous dedication of the entire United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) team to supporting governance, development and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

I would like to begin by offering our deepest condolences to the victims of the recent violence in Kabul and their families. Such events are a sad reminder of the unacceptable toll that the conflict in Afghanistan continues to take on its people. The 31 May bombing sought to divide the Afghan Government and people, as well as Afghanistan's international partners. As armed groups inflict suffering on innocent civilians, our resolve to stand with the people and the Government of Afghanistan in pursuing a peaceful resolution of the conflict and stability in the country will not waver.

The United States is reviewing its engagement and security posture in Afghanistan. It is appropriate to take the time to make sure that we are carrying forward our commitment to Afghanistan in the most effective way possible. While the review continues, there can be no question that the United States remains wholly engaged in supporting the Afghan Government, diplomatically and militarily; supporting the development of the Afghan security forces, including through the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission; continuing its generous provision of civilian assistance; doing its part diplomatically to strengthen the international and regional consensus; and working to advance an Afghan peace process.

That leads me to a point I want to make about the political process in Afghanistan. The first meeting of the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation, convened by the Afghan Government on 6 June, reaffirmed the commitment of Afghanistan, its neighbours in the region and the international community to supporting an Afghan-led and -owned political process for achieving peace in Afghanistan. The United States joined the 27 countries and organizations represented at the meeting to call on armed and extremist groups to announce an immediate end to their attacks and their entry into peace talks with the Afghan Government. In that context, we commend the Government for its continued commitment to an inclusive, Afghan-led peace process, despite the ongoing attacks.

Progress in implementing the peace agreement with Hizb-i Islami gives us hope for similar progress towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict with the Taliban. Such talks are essential. There is no military solution that will bring a durable peace. The path to a negotiated settlement is available, and the Taliban must choose to take it. In fact, a durable peace and genuine stability in Afghanistan can come only with the commitment of Afghanistan's neighbours and near-neighbours to those goals. We welcome the commitments made during the Kabul process meetings and call on Afghanistan's neighbours to unconditionally cease their support for armed and violent-extremist groups. Those commitments are important right now. The Taliban, along with the Haqqani Network and affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and other armed groups, is increasing its attacks, killing and injuring thousands of Afghans and delaying the progress that Afghanistan so desperately needs. And while development assistance remains robust, a precipitous drop in domestic and foreign direct investment has stalled the private-sector-led growth that Afghanistan needs in order to employ its youth, reduce poverty and give communities hope.

In the context of those and other challenges Afghanistan continues to face, we strongly support the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan as an essential partner of Afghanistan and the international community. UNAMA plays a critical role in supporting peace and reconciliation, empowering women, defending the human rights of all Afghans and coordinating humanitarian assistance. We look forward to the completion next month of the Secretary-General's strategic review and to discussing ways to strengthen the Mission's efficiency, cost-effectiveness and core competencies.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Yamamoto, for his candid briefing, and we welcome the Secretary-General's comprehensive report (S/2017/508). We also welcome the Secretary-General's visit to Afghanistan, which demonstrated his solidarity with the Afghan people.

Despite decades of effort by national and international actors to stabilize the security situation in Afghanistan, the situation today remains volatile and has deteriorated further since we last met (see S/PV.7896). The ongoing violence takes a heavy toll on the civilian population. Each attack on a mosque, each bazaar, home, hospital or school targeted, each life lost, undermines the ability of the Afghan people to plan their lives and futures with hope or certainty.

Let me reiterate Sweden's condemnation of the recent terrorist attacks in Kabul and extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of those affected. We call for an end to this senseless violence and for those responsible to be held to account.

We encourage the Afghan Government to take the necessary steps to defuse the tensions following the attacks. As we heard today from the Special Representative, unity is of the utmost importance if the people of Afghanistan are to tackle the many challenges ahead. Internal differences must be put aside in order to make progress with the reform agenda and to bring an end to the conflict.

As the Secretary-General says in his report, "[p]eace must be attained through negotiations and not on the battlefield" (*S/2017/508, para. 58*). With that in mind, we commend the Afghan Government on the first meeting of the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation. We look forward to the next meeting under the process and to cooperating closely with the Afghan authorities to ensure women's participation. A peace process without women is not a peace process. Sweden remains fully committed to supporting an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process. We also echo the calls of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the need to restart the dialogue with the Taliban towards a lasting political settlement.

All of us, but particularly the countries of the region, have an interest in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. In turn, sustained and constructive engagement by the region will be essential to make that a reality. Regional tensions continue to undermine Afghanistan's long-term stability and economic growth. We call on all parties to act constructively and responsibly and work together towards sustainable peace. Enhanced dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan is an important part of this complex puzzle.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continues to play a critical role in supporting the Government and the people of Afghanistan as they work towards building a democratic, prosperous and peaceful society. However, significant challenges to that goal remain. Against that background, an efficient, effective and appropriately configured United Nations presence in Afghanistan — in Kabul, as well as in the provinces — continues to be vital to support efforts to achieve lasting peace. We welcome the ongoing strategic review and await the final report. Looking forward, Sweden sees the following priorities for United Nations support to Afghanistan.

First, there is a need for a comprehensive approach that includes development, human rights, the rule of law and humanitarian assistance. Providing appropriate support will require a coherent and well-coordinated United Nations.

Secondly, it is important to continue UNAMA's field presence at current levels, so as to safeguard crucial contacts between international and local actors, build local capacities, as well as facilitate humanitarian access.

Thirdly, there is a need for a stronger political mandate for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, including on regional issues related to peace efforts, and with sufficient resources to implement this political mandate.

Fourthly, we see the need for improved donor coordination, with a continued sharp focus on development, humanitarian and human rights issues.

Fifthly, women's participation and integration into the political, economic and social life of Afghanistan must be at the core of UNAMA's activities.

Finally, children continue to suffer disproportionately from the violence in Afghanistan. We welcome an enhanced focus on children and armed conflict. Words must now be translated into action with respect to this agenda. In addition, ensuring respect for humanitarian principles, human rights and international humanitarian law should always be an integral part of United Nations missions.

Building peaceful and inclusive societies is not easy. It takes patience, courage and determination from all the parties involved. We must now ensure that the gains made in Afghanistan are not lost. Renewed efforts from Afghan leaders and the international community are needed to move the country down the path to peace. Sweden has provided assistance to Afghanistan for more than three decades, and we are committed to stand with the Afghans for the long term.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I would also like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and the Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, for their important briefings.

Unfortunately, during the first half of 2017, the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated, with an increase in deadly terrorist attacks. The attacks, including the 31 May suicide bombing in Kabul, which caused at least 90 dead and more than 500 wounded have once again covered Afghanistan with blood. My delegation reiterates its firm condemnation of those attacks, which have once again cost the lives of hundreds of innocent people. My delegation also wish to express its condolences to the victims and to their families.

The demonstrations that took place in the wake of those attacks, far from calming the political situation, have only served to exacerbate both political and ethnic tensions. Nevertheless, we are pleased that the two highest authorities of the country, the President, Mr. Ashraf Ghani, and the Chief Executive, Mr. Abdullah Abdullah, undertook a constructive dialogue aimed at improving their relations.

Another positive event that my delegation wishes to welcome is the continued implementation of the peace agreement between the Government and the Hizb-i Islami organization of Mr. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, as attested to by the return to Kabul of Mr. Hekmatyar on 4 May. However, we regret the lack of meaningful progress in the peace talks between the Government and the Taliban, a situation that contributes to the high level of violence, which we deplore, throughout the country.

Nevertheless, despite this environment, we are pleased to note that the Afghan Government, as well as its partners, remain determined to make efforts for peace and stability to return to Afghanistan. As such, we believe that the vision for peace expressed by the Afghan Government in a document that stresses the need for an inclusive peace process to put an end to the conflict, as well as the appointment of the Chair of the High Peace Council, are steps in the right direction.

The efforts of international forces to support their Afghan counterparts has continued to be a determining factor in combating terrorist groups, in particular the Taliban and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. With regard to regional cooperation, besides the efforts of the Afghan and Pakistan Governments to improve relations, we can also highlight the fact that the countries of the region have spared no effort to restore peace in Afghanistan. Accordingly, the situation in that country fortunately remained the primary focus of concern during substantive meetings held in Astana, as well as during the recent Kabul process for peace and security cooperation conference on 6 June.

For its part, UNAMA, whose outstanding work I would like to take the opportunity to commend, has continued to actively support local peace initiatives in a number of provinces and, moreover, worked in multiple ways to support the Government and the people of Afghanistan.

I am pleased to note that, on 6 June, UNAMA supported a conference on women's role in the peace process — something that we deem to be important — in Herat province at which participants vigorously called for concrete action to implement Afghanistan's national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000).

The human rights and humanitarian situation remains concerning because of persistent insecurity, which, as we know, has entailed an increase in the number of civilian casualties, including, unfortunately, many women and children.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to commend the commitment of not only the relevant United Nations agencies but also that of the relevant non-governmental organizations as well as their crucial contribution to meeting the needs of the population — a push spurred by solidarity that Afghanistan still urgently requires in a difficult economic situation characterized by weak growth and a regrettable level of productivity.

On behalf of the Senegalese delegation, I would like to conclude by reiterating its encouragement to the Afghan Government as well as its full support for the Special Representative and the UNAMA team.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his comprehensive analysis of the situation in Afghanistan. We listened with interest to the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal. We agree with the assessments made in the report (S/2017/508) of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan. We support the personal efforts of Secretary-General Guterres with regard to ensuring a sustainable Afghan settlement. In that regard, we echo the profound and far-reaching statement by the representative of Kazakhstan.

Afghanistan needs to become an active participant in future regional and integrational processes. Afghanistan has always been and will remain a friend of Russia. In that regard, the recent series of terrorist attacks that recently swept the country have weighed heavily on us. We extend our sincere condolences to the Government and the people of Afghanistan for the victims of those appalling crimes. We express our solidarity with those from the diplomatic corps who suffered from those attacks. We are seriously concerned about the growing internal political and military tension within the country. Afghanistan is seemingly unable to break the vicious cycle of violence, and the situation continues to grow worse, with low levels of economic growth and the increasing terrorist threat. This string of problems is a major burden for the people of Afghanistan, including its selfless armed forces.

In that vein, what is increasingly important with regard to stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan is the task of achieving national reconciliation. We support the corresponding efforts undertaken by Kabul in that respect. We proceed from the premise that the process must be guided and implemented by the Afghans themselves. We are ready to provide assistance in promoting that, including through flexibly approaching issues that concern potentially loosening the sanctions regime of the relevant Security Council committees. At the same time, we note the decreasing effectiveness of many of the international mechanisms for supporting national reconciliation in Afghanistan, which seem to involve too many actors. On the other hand, narrow formats clearly do not take into account the interests of many of the countries of the region, which also negatively affects the results of their work.

In that regard, we are convinced that the launch of the Moscow talks on Afghanistan at the beginning of the year is an inclusive and the most promising method for establishing direct and constructive dialogue on issues concerning national reconciliation. The refusal of certain States to participate in those talks for no specific reason has left us perplexed. Given that India and Pakistan have become full members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and that Afghanistan and Iran have applied, the prospects for national reconciliation can only grow.

We must acknowledge that the main tasks facing the international military presence in the country over the past 15 years remain unrealized. In many cases, the situation has actually gotten worse. We are not looking to accuse anyone, as that is not our political practice. Let me make it clear to everyone that that is not our goal. The task of reaching a settlement in Afghanistan requires a consolidation of international and regional efforts. Only our collective joint efforts will allow us to unravel the complex tangle of problems and move the country towards stable development in an atmosphere of cooperation and good neighbourliness. That is the only way in which counter-terrorism efforts will yield the necessary benefits. In that regard, we support the arrangements reached between President Ahmadzai of Afghanistan and Prime Minister Sharif of Pakistan at the Astana meeting.

However, instead of making progress on a unification agenda, some of our partners would appear to resort to baseless allegations and rhetoric, including against Russia. I would like to point out that many years ago Russia was one of the first countries to draw the attention of the international community and the Afghans to the spike in terror activity in the northern part of the country. Our country made a significant contribution to counter-terrorism efforts in Afghanistan, including in cooperation with the United States and NATO. We are referring to the transit of military cargo, supplying helicopters and the training of Afghan troops. We are very troubled by the intensification of the capabilities of Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham in Afghanistan. The ranks of that group are being filled. Its devastating potential is growing. The problem is dangerous and must not be ignored or glossed over.

We have received reports of flights of unidentified aircraft that have been observed providing assistance to Afghan militants. The scale and scope of those flights are expanding. They are already reaching the provinces

of Sari Pul, Farah Kandahar, Herat and Nangarhar. The flights often end as soon as the Afghan authorities publish the relevant information. We need to keep the situation under close review and we need to clamp down on that type of cove activities. We deem the demand by Afghan members of Parliament to clarify the situation well grounded, and we expect the United Nations Mission to provide a comprehensive report on those events.

Narcotics pose a serious threat to stability in Afghanistan and its neighbours, and to our friends and allies in Central Asia. We are troubled by data showing that drug production and poppy crops are once again expanding. The rise in income from drug trafficking is inevitably spurring terrorist activity. In that regard, we call for international efforts to be stepped up in combating Afghan drug trafficking. We see good potential for bolstering counter-narcotics cooperation between Afghanistan and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Once again we repeat that the complex problems in Afghanistan can be solved only on the basis of broad, sincere cooperation at international and regional levels. The task of harmonizing the approaches of external players is becoming more urgent. Addressing that task with a view to achieving sustainable national reconciliation in Afghanistan is the very purpose of the Moscow negotiations.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): Let me join others in welcoming Special Representative Yamamoto back to the Security Council. At the outset, I would like to reiterate the full support of the United Kingdom for him and for the vital work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

Sadly, as he and the Afghan Ambassador have made clear, these are trying times for Afghanistan. The horrific truck-bomb three weeks ago in Kabul was a stark reminder of the threat that ordinary Afghans face as they go about their daily peaceful lives. It is a threat that we read about, that we watch on the news or hear about in the Chamber, and yet the proximity of the attack to the British Embassy and other diplomatic missions in Kabul really brought home to us the barbarity of those who seek to terrorize Afghanistan. Sadly, it was once again innocent Afghan men, women and children who bore the terrible toll of that attack.

In response to this horrific tide of violence, the United Kingdom stands in solidarity with the people, the Government and the armed forces of Afghanistan. We stand in solidarity, knowing what it means to endure terror in our streets, knowing what it means to stand up to those who seek to divide us. Whether in the streets of Kabul, Manchester or London, our message must be clear and unwavering: enough is enough.

Those attacks must come to an end. All support to those who commit such terrible acts must come to an end. For Afghanistan, that means the region working together to create the conditions for a more stable future for Afghanistan. It means continuing to prioritize an Afghan-led and -owned peace process — one that leads to a political settlement that ends the violence. It means acknowledging the successes the Afghan Government has achieved in such challenging circumstances. It means Afghans coming together to protect those gains in the face of such huge challenges.

Afghanistan needs to be united now more than ever. It needs to be looking to the future in hope, not in fear. The people of Afghanistan need to feel that they have a stake in that future. We believe that holding parliamentary elections based on a credible and realistic timeline would be an important step towards creating that stake, towards creating broader political inclusion. The setting of a date would be good news and should serve as a catalyst for the necessary reforms to be undertaken and processes to be put in place with due speed to ensure that elections are free, fair and transparent.

We welcome President Ghani's work to reshape and re-energize his Government's efforts in pursuit of peace. As the tragic events in Kabul remind us, now is the time for action and for the implementation of the structures and the processes that will bring about progress on this daunting but essential issue. Afghans from across the country, its ethnic groups and its socioeconomic divides have a stake in this process and need to be embraced and included in pursuit of a national consensus on peace. We encourage meaningful dialogue with all sectors of society, including women and girls.

In all of this, the United Kingdom believes that the United Nations has a crucial role to play — whether by helping to ensure that the rights of Afghan people are protected and upheld or by supporting the Kabul process and its vital work, on building a regional consensus on peace.

I want to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his role in facilitating the launch of the Kabul process earlier this month. That was the first step in a long journey that will need to emphasize both the security and the political tracks, and which will require energy and commitment from all of us to sustain, including from the United Nations. As such, we look forward to the outcome of the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. UNAMA is at the heart of the international community's work on Afghanistan. It is more important now than ever that the Mission be properly configured and empowered to deliver the maximum effect on the issues that are so crucial for Afghanistan's future — whether it is efforts to support the Government's pursuit of peace or its work to uphold the human rights of the Afghan people.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the convening of this open debate on Afghanistan. I wish to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing.

Peace and stability in Afghanistan has a bearing on the fundamental interests of the Afghan people, as well as regional security, stability, development and prosperity. China commends the efforts of the Afghan Government in promoting national stability, reconciliation and economic development, and appreciates the constructive help of the neighbours of Afghanistan and the relevant countries in the region.

Afghanistan faces daunting challenges in the political, economic and security sectors. Recently, the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated, with frequent armed conflicts and terrorist incidents leading to massive civilian casualties, which has captured the attention of all parties. It is imperative for the international community to step up efforts in taking comprehensive measures to promote the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan so as to help the country overcome difficulties and get through this challenging period.

First of all, priority should be given to the prompt restoration of security and stability in the country. The international community should vigorously support the capacity-building efforts of the Afghan national security forces to improve its self-defence capabilities in order to effectively cope with the threats posed by terrorism, cross-border crime and drug trafficking. The international community should stick to a unified standard in enhancing coordination and cooperation to fight against terrorist forces in Afghanistan, cut off the supply of funds and weapons to terrorist organizations, prevent the inflow and return of terrorist combatants, curb the spread of terrorist ideology and eliminate the root causes of terrorism.

Secondly, promoting the national reconciliation process is an important foundation for the long-term peace and stability of the country. Parties in Afghanistan should bear in mind the future of the country and the interests of its people by actively participating in the reconciliation process, resolve differences and conflicts and restore trust through dialogue with a view to finding a solution that is acceptable to all.

The peace agreement between the Afghan Government and the Hezb-i Islami (Gulbuddin) should be implemented, which will serve as a model for further promoting national reconcil the country. The international community should continue its full support for an inclusive reconciliation process that is led and owned by the Afghan people and encourage the parties concerned in Afghanistan to launch peace talks as soon as possible.

Thirdly, strengthening governance capabilities is an important guarantee for peace and reconstruction in the country. Afghan issues should ultimately be managed by the Afghan people. All political factions in Afghanistan should strengthen unity, resolve differences through dialogue and consultations and reach consensus in order to build strong and effective governance capabilities. The international community should respect the right of the Afghan people to independently choose their political system and path to development. Meanwhile, in the light of the national development strategy and Afghanistan's special needs, targeted assistance should be provided to help the Afghan Government improve its governance capabilities.

Fourthly, integration in regional development is a viable solution for peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan. The international community should actively honour its commitments to provide assistance and support the economic and social development of the country. Afghanistan enjoys advantages in resources and geographic location, which brings about great prospects for regional cooperation. As resolution 2344 (2017) and the relevant General Assembly resolutions stipulate, parties should be committed to creating a community with a shared destiny in a

spirit of cooperation in which everyone wins, and to promoting the economic and social development of Afghanistan and regional cooperation through the Belt and Road Initiative. We hope that parties will actively encourage the alignment of the Afghanistan national development strategy with the Belt and Road Initiative, improve links between Afghanistan and Central Asia and other neighbouring countries and provide security guarantees for the implementation of relevant projects so as to help Afghanistan achieve regional development and capitalize on shared development opportunities.

China commends the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and hopes UNAMA will play an active role in helping Afghanistan restore stability, advance national reconciliation, improve its governance capabilities and promote economic and social development. China will continue to support UNAMA's work. China hopes that the ongoing strategic review will help UNAMA focus more on peace, reconciliation and development, strengthen its capabilities in coordinating international support, further optimize resource allocation, improve the management process and enhance its ability to cope with complicated situations.

China has always been a friendly neighbour to Afghanistan and respects the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We have been promoting the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan through the Quadrilateral Coordination Group — made up of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States. We support Afghanistan's efforts to eliminate the threats of terrorism, extremism and drug-related crime, in order to achieve peace, stability and prosperity as soon as possible. China will continue to support Afghanistan in stepping up capacity-building in the security sector and we support an active role by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in helping Afghanistan combat terrorism. China supports Afghanistan's integration in regional cooperation and actively promotes the alignment of the Belt and Road Initiative with the Afghanistan national development strategy. We stand ready to work with the international community to make unremitting efforts in promoting peace, stability and development in Afghanistan as soon as possible.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We express our appreciation to Special Representative Mr. Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing on the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/508) on the overall situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report, which highlights the key political and security challenges facing Afghanistan. The briefing by Special Representative Yamamoto was not only comprehensive, it was also very frank and insightful.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank our colleague the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his briefing. It was a very useful briefing.

We also welcome the recent visit by the Secretary-General to the country to express solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan following the recent terrorist attacks. We condemn those senseless attacks in the strongest possible terms and express our sympathy and solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan. The threats posed by terrorist groups of all kinds are indeed a matter of serious security concern, not only for the country but also for the wider region. We cannot agree more with the Secretary-General's comments in his report in favour of concerted international efforts in countering terrorism.

The long-term security and stability of Afghanistan can be assured only through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and owned political process. In that connection, we note that some progress has been made. However, we understand that peace talks between the Government and the Taliban have shown no progress and the trajectory does not appear promising on that front. We agree with the Secretary-General that a regional environment conducive to an Afghan-led peace process is indeed essential. It is that context that we welcome the Afghan Government's initiative to convene the Kabul process conference on peace and security cooperation, which was held this month in spite of a difficult security situation. The efforts of UNAMA and the promotion of peace, reconciliation and dialogue in support for development in Afghanistan, with full respect for the country's sovereignty and leadership and ownership of the Afghan Government, remains very important. The role of countries of the region is also very critical in creating the necessary conditions for the fight against terrorism and the advancement of peace efforts. In that regard, the recent meeting between the President of Afghanistan and the Prime Minister of Pakistan to improve bilateral relations between their countries is noteworthy but needs to be pursued with greater vigour, all the more so in the light

of the fact that mutual trust is always critical and its absence detrimental.

We welcome the efforts made by the National Unity Government in pushing its reform agenda, fighting corruption and enhancing accountability. We also understand from the report of the Secretary-General that progress has been made towards the holding of credible and transparent elections. We nonetheless stress how critical it is to ensure that there is some level of coherence and unity of purpose in the country's top leadership — and that is true with any Government.

Afghanistan faces enormous security, social and economic challenges. Without continued inclusive economic growth and development, sustained peace and security cannot be achieved. That is why there is a need to support the Government's continued efforts to detail its development priorities in 10 national priority programmes for 10 sectors, as envisioned in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. We hope that the commitments made at the Brussels Conference last October will be honoured. But, once again, for that all to succeed, peace and security in the country will need to be secured and confidence generated.

Let me conclude by expressing support and solidarity with the Afghan Government in its difficult task of addressing the country's multiple challenges with a view to promoting peace, reconciliation and development. I also wish to express appreciation to UNAMA for its continued role in support of those endeavours and for its efforts in carrying out its mandate under very difficult circumstances.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union. I wish to make some remarks in my national capacity.

At the outset, I would like first of all to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Yamamoto, for his presence here today, for his briefing and for his commitment to the work.

My country joins other Security Council members in strongly condemning the recent terrorist attacks in Kabul and other parts of the country. We extend our condolences to the victims and their families and express our full solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan. Those despicable acts strengthens our determination to support Afghanistan's institutions in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, which continue to pose a grave threat to peace and stability. That is why we welcome, like others, the Secretary-General's visit to Kabul last week, as it sent an important signal to the international community as a whole.

We welcome the successful outcome of the first meeting of the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation. By taking this initiative, our Afghan partners have signalled their willingness to pursue the peace and reconciliation process with renewed vigour. We commend the Afghan leadership on these issues, which further reinforces the principle that the process should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. Through its participation in the Kabul process, Italy seeks to express its full support for this initiative. We believe that it is a starting point, and not an end point, and we also hope that broad international backing can provide a solid foundation for positive outcomes in this area.

The Kabul process also confirms the crucial importance of cooperation among regional stakeholders. Afghanistan's terrorist and violent extremist phenomenon, both in its national dimension and beyond, cannot be tackled effectively without close cooperation and unity of purpose among neighbouring countries of the region. Terrorism and violence extremism are a concrete threat to those countries' stability as well. There is a clear convergence of interests. However, tangible measures to extend cooperation, especially at the regional level, must be adopted. Italy supports all initiatives geared towards that goal.

The need for a credible and broad-based reconciliation process underscores the fact that peace in Afghanistan can be achieved only through political means. There is no military solution to this conflict, as we are all reminded by the latest report of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on the protection of civilians, which demonstrates how the most vulnerable categories, especially women and children, are increasingly at risk. The focus on a broad-based and inclusive consensus as the foundation for a successful reconciliation process is key, and we welcome the decision by the Afghan Government to make it the centrepiece of its strategy.

In that context, it will be essential to ensure women's active inclusion and participation, and we renew our hope that the commitment of the Afghan Government and the High Peace Council in this area may find

further tangible application, for instance, through the full implementation of the Afghanistan national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. That goal is all the more important in the framework of safeguarding and further building upon the progress made in women's rights in Afghanistan over the course of the past 16 years.

The continued violent acts by hostile insurgent groups remind us of the fundamental importance of strengthening Afghanistan's institutions, specifically those with the task of ensuring the security and defence of the country and its people. My country supports and encourages the Afghan Government to continue to enhance its efforts to improve the capability of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. To be successful, those efforts will also require a determined fight against all forms of corruption, which Italy will continue to support through its training and advisory activities in the framework of Operation Resolute Support, the NATO-led mission.

The challenges Afghanistan is facing continue to be enormously complex, and one cannot imagine a successful pact for the future of the country in the absence of unity and internal cohesion within the Government and all Afghan institutions, to which we renew our call for a constructive and inclusive approach aimed at resolving outstanding disputes, which are not compatible with the urgent needs of the country. That is also an essential prerequisite for the implementation of other indispensable reforms, as agreed with the international community, which are necessary for consolidating Afghan institutions and generating self-sustaining growth in order to meet the legitimate needs and expectations of the Afghan people. In that context, we hope that the long-awaited electoral reform agenda will soon be completed, thereby allowing the relevant institutions to rapidly set an electoral calendar and ensure a credible, inclusive and transparent process.

I wish to conclude by renewing our appreciation for the crucial work that UNAMA carries out in many areas and under very difficult conditions. Italy looks forward to engaging within the Council on the outcomes of the strategic review mandated by resolution 2344 (2017) last March, in order to further strengthen the Mission and enhance its overall effectiveness.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his work towards implementing the Mission's mandate. We also thank him for his informative and detailed briefing.

We commend the role of the United Nations in Afghanistan. The Secretary-General's visit to Kabul was timely and focused attention on the future of Afghanistan and of the entire Central Asia region. The visit serves as a reminder for the international community of its obligations and responsibilities towards this critical region and its future.

The security situation across Afghanistan is deteriorating, especially with the Taliban's announcement last April of the launch of its seasonal spring offensive and the increase in terrorist attacks, which have recently reached unprecedented levels. We recall the tragic attack that claimed hundreds of victims during the early days of Ramadan and other despicable terrorist attacks that occur on an almost-daily basis across the regions of Afghanistan.

We hope that Afghan militias and armed groups will follow the example set by the agreement between the Government and the Hizb-i Islami, which allowed for the return of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar to the legitimate and legal political stage after the delisting of his party from the Security Council sanctions list. It is important to fight and eliminate terrorist groups wherever they exist, particularly the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant — Khorasan Province, within the framework of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Egypt has traditional and historical links in relations with Afghanistan and feels the influence that the political and security situations in Central Asia and the Middle East have on each other. We therefore reiterate our support for the Afghan Government in its war against terror and its effort to extend State authority across its territory. We support all regional and international efforts aimed at economic and social development in order to bring about the return and repatriation of internally displaced persons and refugees and achieve prosperity for all the people of Afghanistan.

We oppose the lenient approach towards the drug trafficking phenomenon, which is a major threat, particularly in the case of opium, to the stability and security of Afghanistan and Central Asia. We stress the importance of regional and international coordination with the Afghan authorities in the fight against trafficking in drugs, which must be part of the efforts to

fight terrorism, as drugs are a main source of funding for terrorist groups and armed militias.

In conclusion, Cairo attaches great importance to the implementation of Egypt's role as a supporting State for the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. We also affirm the importance of following up on all of the outcomes of the ministerial conference on Afghanistan held in Brussels in October. Egypt's partnership development agency is continuing with its high-quality training programmes for elements of the Afghan police and security forces. We have also been sending Arabic experts to the University of Kabul for a number of years. We attach great importance to building Afghan capacity in the areas of the judiciary, culture, health care and nursing and agriculture and irrigation, as well as in the banking sector. And we continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to reiterate France's condolences to the Afghan people and the families of the victims of the terrible attack of 31 May in Kabul and the incidents that followed it. France stands with the Government of Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism.

I would like to warmly thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his informative briefing, and pay tribute through him to the United Nations personnel who are working every day, in difficult conditions, for Afghanistan's recovery.

France associates itself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union.

France is deeply concerned about the deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan, first because the principal victims of the conflict continue to be civilians, especially women and children, and, secondly, because the increasing numbers of attacks serve only to destabilize the country even more, despite the considerable progress made by the Afghan security forces, whose commitment and courage I pay tribute to today. We should therefore treat the establishment and spread of armed and terrorist groups in Afghanistan very seriously. Lastly, the deterioration in security is exacerbating an already fragile humanitarian situation that has recently been intensified by the large-scale return of refugees from Pakistan and Iran. In that regard, France encourages the Afghan Government to focus on ensuring equal treatment for all refugees and displaced persons. We also welcome the work being done by the United Nations, particularly by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

In this highly volatile security situation, it is more important than ever for the Afghan Government to remain united. The best response to the terrorists is to display unity, to rally to the cause and to demonstrate a determination to deepen and consolidate Afghan democracy. The Government should continue to make a priority of working to achieve the reforms to which it is committed, especially electoral reform and the fight against corruption and drug trafficking, which continues to fuel the Taliban's insurgency. I would like to emphasize that last point in particular, since in view of the fact that in 2016, drug production in Afghanistan reached a new record of 4,800 tons, the Afghan authorities' implementation of its national anti-drug plan of action is urgent.

On the human rights front, the situation of women and children continues to be extremely precarious. It is vital to ensure that the Afghan authorities continue to work to fully implement their commitments to women's rights and the protection of children. Besides the Government's implementation of reforms in both the short and long term, lasting stability in Afghanistan can be achieved only through national reconciliation. France welcomed President Ghani's initiative on 6 June in convening the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation, for which we reiterate our full support. While it is up to Afghans to lead the process of restoring peace in their country, the wholehearted commitment and unambiguous support of all its neighbours is essential. We urge them to work with renewed energy and concrete efforts to that end. We have a collective responsibility to actively support the stabilization of Afghanistan and contribute to establishing lasting peace there.

In that context, support for Afghanistan by the international community in general, and the United Nations in particular, has never been so important, as the Secretary-General's recent visit emphasized. In that regard, France and the European Union continue to be fully committed to Afghanistan's cause. We await with great interest the conclusions of the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) next month. We value the Mission's role in exercising its good offices. We also have to ask what the role of the United Nations and UNAMA in supporting Afghanistan's reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts will be. Ultimately, simplifying the coordination

mechanisms that are in place could very likely bring about an improvement in the effectiveness and visibility of United Nations assistance.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my country's full support to Afghanistan and its Government and to the activities of the United Nations in aid of their efforts.

Mr. Herasymenko (Ukraine): I would like to start by expressing my delegation's condemnation of the recent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, and our condolences to the relatives of the victims and to the Government of Afghanistan. We hope that those responsible will be brought to justice.

I, too, join others in expressing our gratitude to Special Representative Yamamoto and his team for their efforts in Afghanistan.

While we align ourselves with the statement to be delivered later today by the observer of the European Union, I would also like to raise several points in my national capacity.

We take positive note of the Afghan National Unity Government's recent accomplishments in addressing the country's challenges. First, we are seeing encouraging progress on the political front with high-level merit-based appointments, as well as consistent efforts to counter corruption and create an environment conducive to future parliamentary and presidential elections by strengthening electoral institutions and improving the relevant legislation.

Secondly, the Government is moving forward with justice-sector reform, particularly its anticipated revision of the penal code in order to incorporate State obligations under the Rome Statute and the United Nations conventions against corruption and torture, which will ensure that those who commit war crimes and crimes against humanity will be held accountable.

Thirdly, the protection of human rights and the promotion of gender equality have received additional impetus. The Government continues to work diligently to draft legislation aimed at combating and ending the harassment of women and children. Overall, the country's progress in the area of human rights has been impressive.

Fourthly, efforts to counter the production of illicit drugs used for financing terrorism have been resumed, resulting in the successful conduct of several counter-narcotics operations, while the eradication of opium poppy fields has almost doubled.

Lastly, the Kabul process conference held on 6 June at President Ghani's initiative should help to foster regional cooperation on peace and security.

At the same time, those achievements have been accompanied by complex internal political developments and increased tensions between political parties in anticipation of the upcoming election season. I should emphasize that it is absolutely imperative to preserve what has been achieved with such enormous effort and sacrifice. It is up to the Afghan stakeholders to demonstrate maturity and put aside their differences for the sake of achieving a sustainable and comprehensive peace and national accord.

Meanwhile, terrorism remains a major threat to Afghanistan and directly affects peace and stability in the region, with the Taliban announcing its annual offensive and affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) raising their heads. The attempts by several regional players to cooperate with certain factions and the Taliban, ostensibly with the goal of preventing ISIL from expanding its presence in Afghanistan, are alarming. We express concern at those endeavours. Tactics based on the notion that the enemy of my enemy is my friend are questionable in general and should in no way be applied to contacts with terrorists. We are of the view that such collaboration can only exacerbate the already difficult situation in the country. Let us not forget the lessons of the not-so-distant past.

It is also disturbing that, despite extensive military pressure and the attempts to eradicate the ISIL presence in Afghanistan, the group launched a series of high-profile attacks in Kabul, including on a military hospital in March and, more recently, in the heart of the diplomatic district in May. All of that creates an atmosphere of fear and terror, thereby contributing to instability and prolonged conflict, and provokes social frustration and protest, as we saw recently in the capital. In that light, we call on the Afghan authorities to conduct a thorough investigation into those attacks so as to prevent their recurrence in future, as well as to improve the protection of diplomatic missions and their personnel.

Let me also take this opportunity to echo and support the call of the Afghan Ambassador on the Council to strictly enforce and strengthen the sanctions regime.

We are also concerned by the continued suffering of civilians, especially the high number of losses among women and children as a result of the fighting, as well as from landmines and explosive remnants of war. We note the Government's commitment to the prevention and the mitigation of civilian casualties, as well as its intention to ratify Protocol V to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. In that regard, we call on international humanitarian demining actors, in particular the United Nations Mine Action Service, to work together with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) with a view to promoting mine-risk education programmes and assisting the Government in conducting mine-clearance operations.

The growing number of internally displaced persons, as well as of refugees repatriated to Afghanistan, is another point of concern. The International Organization for Migration estimates that at least 600,000 refugees could return this year. Yet the reports by UNAMA about the sharp increase in civilian casualties during clashes between the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and the Taliban show how unsafe this situation is for the affected population. In that regard, we also regret that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had to significantly cut cash grants, from $400 to $200, to Afghan returnees while they continue to struggle with severe food insecurity.

Regional cooperation is crucial for stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan. In order to bring sustainable peace and prosperity to the country, key stakeholders have to spare no effort in confronting the major regional threat posed by terrorism. We agree with the Secretary-General's findings that this goal can be achieved with the improvement of bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan through a constructive dialogue. We commend the readiness of the Afghan leadership to extend the hand of friendship and to seek ways of improving bilateral relations with neighbours by developing mutual security cooperation. In this vein, it is imperative to strengthen border controls to cut terrorist flows and to deprive Taliban fighters of shelter or any kind of assistance.

We also hope that the arrangements made at the Kabul process conference on 6 June will help to reboot peace talks and enlist neighbours in a regional fight against terrorism. In that regard, we urge the guarantors in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group to assist in accomplishing these endeavours.

In conclusion, Ukraine would like to reiterate its strong support for UNAMA activities in assisting Afghanistan to cope with security, economic and development challenges, as well as to enact national reforms aimed at creating a sound foundation for peace, security and prosperity, both in the country and in the wider region. We expect that the strategic review of UNAMA's mandate, priorities and related resources, as requested by resolution 2344 (2017) and to be completed by this July, will result in enhanced Mission efficiency. Our common goal is to make irreversible the process of transformation of Afghanistan into a steady and prosperous nation that lives in peace and harmony with all of its neighbours.

Ms. Carrión (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Yamamoto, for his comprehensive briefing. We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/508), which reflects the complex situation that Afghanistan continues to face, as well as for his recent visit to the country.

Uruguay reaffirms its support for the Government of Afghanistan and encourages it to continue its efforts to achieve lasting peace based on the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity. The consolidation of democratic institutions remains essential to the achievement of stability. The progress made in relation to the Government's programme of priority reforms is encouraging, in particular the fight against corruption, the improved accountability on the part of senior officials and electoral preparations.

It is nonetheless discouraging that the lack of dialogue and progress towards a peace agreement between the Afghan Government and the Taliban continue to cause great suffering to the Afghan people. It is worrying that, according to the report, security-related incidents have reached the highest recorded number since 2001. The situation of instability and insecurity continues to expose the vulnerability of civilians. The fighting continues to cause a large number of casualties among the civilian population, particularly women and children, who, as usual, are disproportionately affected by the upsurge in violence. The number of victims among women and children has been increasing due to the effects of aerial operations,

attacks with improvised explosive devices and suicide bombings.

It is worth recalling the 31 May attack on in Kabul, which resulted in a large number of fatalities and hundreds of wounded. In that connection, we wish to express our heartfelt condolences to the Afghan people and Government.

The serious human rights situation and humanitarian issues arising from the rapid increase in the number of newly internally displaced persons caused by the intensification of the conflict, to which can be added the large number of refugees returning to the country, are also alarming.

Uruguay reiterates its vigorous condemnation and repudiation of terrorist violence, and reiterates as well that violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law must not go unpunished.

The political, economic and security challenges that continue to confront Afghanistan require the continued support of the countries of the region, the international community, the United Nations and, in particular, the Security Council. In that regard, we express our appreciation for the work of the Kabul process, which was recently launched. Similarly, we would like to recognize, and express our appreciation for, the work of Special Representative and the entire staff of UNAMA, who with their unwavering dedication continue to support the Afghan people. We would also like to thank to all those involved in providing humanitarian aid, who often work in extremely difficult conditions, which include being directly targeted by attacks.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as the representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

Bolivia thanks the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his detailed briefing and presentation of the report (S/2017/508) of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan, and welcomes this opportunity to express its overwhelming support for his work. Similarly, Bolivia thanks the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for the information that he provided to the members of the Security Council today. Through its Ambassador, Bolivia reiterates its condolences to the Government and the people of Afghanistan for the victims of the recent terrorist attacks that Afghanistan has endured. Those responsible for those acts must be brought to justice and punished to the full extent of the law.

Bolivia commends the visit by the Secretary-General to Afghanistan and shares his concern about the proliferation of various terrorist groups in Afghan territory and the need for a more coordinated international response to counter terrorism. We also underscore the Secretary-General's reference to the need for the United Nations to continue support for the Kabul process, led by Afghanistan and in line with the strategy of the Afghan Government.

We would be remiss if we did not mention our concern about the high number of internally displaced persons. According to the report presented by Mr. Yamamoto, between January and mid-May more than 100,000 people became internally displaced within the country. We call for concerted efforts aimed at the sustainable return of citizens, with international organizations providing concrete and tangible support, in particular for enhancing assistance to internally displaced Afghans and Afghan refugees so as to facilitate their voluntary, safe and dignified return and their sustainable reinsertion into their society of origin so that they can contribute to the stability of Afghanistan.

We commend the work of United Nations Mine Action Service, which has been working to provide education at transit centres to ensure that returnees are informed of the existence and danger of antipersonnel mines, explosive remnants of war and other improvised explosive devices. We also highlight that 18 communities have been declared mine-free, thereby making it possible for approximately 20,000 people in an area of nearly 10 square kilometres to move freely about their community.

With respect to political events, we recognize the major efforts made by the Government and the people of Afghanistan, and we reiterate our commitment to defend the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We recall the interconnected nature of the challenges facing the people of Afghanistan and sustainable progress relating to security, development and governance, which are mutually reinforcing.

With regard to the report of the Secretary-General, it is very important to highlight the work on the peace agreement between various factions, such as Hizb-i Islami, and on negotiations to release prisoners. We recognize and express our gratitude for the efforts of

the Government, which devised a road map in April based on the need for a process of inclusive dialogue that brings all parties involved to the negotiating table wiht a view to strengthen institutions through which differences of a political nature can be channelled.

Bolivia is also grateful to UNAMA for its logistical and technical work in a broad-based, Afghan-led process in support of new local peace initiatives in nine different provinces aimed at the non-violent settlement of disputes and conflicts.

UNAMA recorded 5,687 security-related incidents in Afghanistan between January and March of this year — an unprecedented number, including in areas that previously had been considered secure. We strongly condemn the attacks of recent days, and we call on the international community to take firm measures so as to ensure the strengthening of, and support for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and to achieve a stable and democratic Afghanistan — to which end there is a need to shore up its ability to maintain security and stability in the entire country.

We welcome the multilateral and bilateral initiatives mentioned in the report, such as the various regional initiatives in Central Asia and the conferences on Afghanistan held in Moscow in April and in Kabul on 6 June — otherwise known as the Kabul process — which proposed to coordinate efforts at the regional level and make it possible for our brotherly country to emerge from the situation which it is undergoing.

We reiterate the crucial importance of encouraging regional cooperation as an effective means to promote security, stability and economic and social development in Afghanistan, while recognizing the importance of the contributions of neighbouring and regional partners.

Lastly, we must recall that the conflict has been ongoing for several years, and different types of solutions, including a military solution, have been tried. We have come to a point where there are now more than 100,000 troops in Afghan territory, while, at the same time, terrorist groups have multiplied, with the increased presence of groups like Da'esh. We therefore call on the entire international community, in particular countries in the region, to contribute positively so that the Government and the people of Afghanistan, as well as the groups involved, can achieve a reconciliation that is inclusive of everyone.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/508), and Special Representative Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing this morning. These reports and the Secretary-General's own conclusions following his visit to Kabul last week confirm the growing concern, if not alarm, at the deteriorating political, economic and security situation in Afghanistan.

Pakistan strongly condemns the repeated, large-scale and orchestrated terrorist attacks in Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan. There can be no justification for the murder and mayhem aimed at innocent civilians. Pakistan is also a principal victim of terrorism. We share the pain and the agony of the Afghan people and wish to work with them to defeat and eliminate the scourge of terrorism and violence from Afghanistan and our region.

We hope that the political differences that have become more pronounced recently within the Afghan Government will be reconciled by President Ghani Ahmadzai, Chief Executive Abdullah and other political leaders and groups. The continued economic and political support to the Afghan Government from the international community remains essential for the preservation of political amity and the implementation of much-needed governance reforms.

Besides internal differences, Afghanistan's security faces a twin challenge: the insurgency led by the Tehrik-e-Taliban Afghanistan, on the one hand, and the campaign of terrorism promoted by the so-called Islamic State, or Da'esh, on the other. Several terrorist groups are now associated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, including Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, among other terrorist groups. Those violent groups not only threaten Afghanistan and its neighbours, but also pose a global terrorist threat.

It has been my country's consistent view that peace can be restored in Afghanistan only — and this I emphasize — through a negotiated settlement between Kabul and the Afghan Taliban. That has also long been the consensus of the international community — one that we saw expressed this morning. A negotiated peace

was also the conclusion reached by the Secretary-General following his visit to Afghanistan last week.

Over the years, Pakistan has done what it could, when asked, to help facilitate such a negotiated settlement. Pakistan initiated the Murree talks in July 2015, which were scuttled by a series of well-known developments. Thereafter, we sought to resuscitate the talks under the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG).

Pakistan has continued to engage in all other processes designed to promote a political solution: the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, the 6+1 peace formula, the International Contact Group for Afghanistan, the QCG, the Moscow format of regional consultations on Afghanistan and, most recently, the Kabul process. We believe that the promotion of a political settlement and the pursuit of a military solution in Afghanistan are mutually incompatible. Continued reliance on a military option or an enhancement in troop numbers without an accompanying political strategy will not produce a result different from the one witnessed in the past 15 or 16 years. It will instead lead to more violence and bloodshed for the Afghan people; it will not yield a political solution.

Nor can, in our opinion, the resilience of the insurgency be explained away by convenient references to external safe havens or support centres. Given that large areas of Afghanistan are now under the control of the Afghan Taliban, their safe havens are inside, not outside, Afghanistan. As a country that continues to host over 2 million Afghan refugees, and many more who are undocumented, Pakistan expects the gratitude, not the hostility, of the Afghan Government. On our part, Pakistan's successive military operations have managed to crush or expel all terrorist and militant groups from our tribal territory, which borders Afghanistan.

Despite the provocative remarks made by my colleague from Afghanistan, my country remains committed to not allowing its territory to be used for terrorism against any other country. We are implementing border controls, including the fencing and monitoring of vulnerable sections of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Any issue relating to cross-border terrorism and cross-border violations can be raised and discussed in the coordination mechanisms, including the bilateral mechanism for intelligence-sharing and cooperation in border management, established in March.

In Astana earlier this month, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Ashraf Ghani agreed to re-energize Pakistan-Afghanistan cooperation so as to eliminate the menace of terrorism from our region. They also agreed to revitalize the QCG to promote peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. We urge all parties — in particular the Tehrik-e-Taliban Afghanistan and all its constituent groups — to return to the path of negotiations in response to the call made by the Secretary-General. Pakistan and Afghanistan's other friends can assist in promoting a negotiated settlement. But peace can be negotiated only — only — when the Afghan parties desire it and they agree to eschew a military solution.

Today there is every reason for the Afghan parties and their friends to pursue the path of a negotiated peace. All of them face a common threat from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and the terrorist groups affiliated with it. Among them, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and the Jamaat ul-Ahrar target Pakistan from their bases in Afghanistan. Those groups must be rooted out from their bases as part of an effective counter-terrorism campaign in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, apart from Afghanistan itself, Pakistan has suffered more from the wars and violence that have engulfed Afghanistan for over 35 years than any other country. No country other than mine would gain more from peace in Afghanistan. We are confident that, whatever our differences in the past, in the end the deep bonds of religion, culture, history and geography between Pakistan and Afghanistan will assert themselves and produce an era of peaceful and mutually beneficial cooperation between our fraternal nations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): We thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing, and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, for his statement.

At the outset, let me reiterate our heartfelt condolences for those who lost their lives in the series of terrorist attacks that began on 31 May in Kabul. We once again strongly condemn those heinous acts of terror. Turkey will continue its support to the Government of Afghanistan in its fight against terrorism and in its efforts to bring peace, security and stability to the country

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the members of the diplomatic community in Kabul for their perseverance in the execution of their duties despite all the challenges they face. We also commend the role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in standing with the Afghan people and coordinating the efforts of the international stakeholders in Afghanistan. We will continue to support UNAMA's activities and efforts in that regard.

I would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2017/508). We share his concerns regarding the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan. We also applaud the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) for their determined stance against terrorism. We acknowledge the sacrifices of the ANDSF.

The presence of Da'esh in the country is also a cause for serious concern and constitutes yet another reason to continue supporting Afghanistan.

The achievements of the past 15 years need to be consolidated. The continued support of the international community during the transformation decade is crucial. We are pleased to see that the international community reiterated its support for Afghanistan in the NATO Warsaw Summit and the Brussels Conference last year. It is imperative to live up to the commitments made to Afghanistan.

Turkey upheld its previous development contributions and pledged another $150 million for the period 2018-2020. We are also providing $60 million to sustain the ANDSF for the period 2018-2020, in line with the NATO Warsaw Summit decisions. We will contiue to support the Afghan Government's security and development efforts, both bilaterally and on multilateral platforms. In that context, our support through the NATO Resolute Support mission and the training of Afghan women police officers in Turkey will continue.

In line with the international community's continued support to Afghanistan, we welcome the anti-corruption efforts of the Afghan Government. We attach importance to the functioning of the National Unity Government, as it symbolizes Afghan unity. The international community should continue to support the National Unity Government and encourage its components to work in harmony with each other.

We are closely following the developments regarding First Vice-President Dostum, who is currently in Turkey for medical purposes. He will return to Afghanistan upon completion of those medical procedures. We agree that upholding the rule of law and eliminating impunity are imperative for stability in Afghanistan. However, the case against First Vice-President Dostum might not be the most appropriate occasion to prove that point. The case needs to be handled in a way that will not put at risk the support provided to the National Unity Government or create further deterioration of the security situation, especially in northern Afghanistan.

We support Afghan-led and -owned peace and reconciliation efforts, which aim at achieving lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan. The first meeting of the Kabul process for eace and security cooperation conference, held on 6 June, was a positive development in that direction. The meeting also provided the international community with an opportunity to display its solidarity with Afghanistan in a difficult period. We hope that the agreement between the Afghan Government and Hezb-i Islami will serve as a model for others. The progress made in the implementation of the agree nt is encouraging, and we were pleased to see them participating in the Kabul process meeting.

Enhanced cooperation and increased dialogue among the countries of the region is also necessary. In fact, it is the region itself that has the greatest role, interest and responsibility in establishing and sustaining a secure, prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan. In that regard, Turkey will continue its contributions to Afghanistan, inter alia within the multilateral platforms, including through the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Braun (Germany): To start, let me thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Yamamoto, for his comprehensive briefing and both him and his staff for their tireless efforts.

Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Afghanistan finds itself in a tense political situation. The despicable attack in the vicinity of the German Embassy in Kabul on 31 May was one of the deadliest suicide attacks in Afghan history, leaving

over 80 dead and more than 400 injured. The Permanent Representative of Afghanistan provided some details in his statement earlier today. We condemn in the strongest terms the senseless killing of so many innocent victims. As in numerous similar attacks in the past, once again civilians were the targets most affected. We call on the Afghan authorities to conduct a thorough criminal investigation and to hold those responsible accountable for their crimes.

Those perverse attacks, carried out in the holy month of Ramadan, resulted in far too many casualties and caused significant damage to our Embassy. Numerous other diplomatic missions and non-governmental organizations were also affected. But that heinous act only strengthens our resolve. Germany remains strongly committed to working side by side with our Afghan partners to tackle the challenges before us.

We commend the National Unity Government for keeping its doors open to peace negotiations with the Taliban. A comprehensive peace and reconciliation process remains the only way to long-term stability in Afghanistan and the region. Only an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process will result in a sustainable solution. Germany continues to stand ready to assist Afghanistan in the process. The Kabul process is the Afghan-led solution on the way towards peace.

The fragile security situation remains the main challenge in Afghanistan. As Secretary-General Guterres points out in his report (S/2017/508), the number of casualties among women and children increased by 24 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively. More needs to be done to protect the most vulnerable in Afghan society. The adoption of a national civilian casualty prevention and mitigation strategy by the Government is an important step in the right direction. It now needs to be implemented with vigour. In addition, the imminent ratification of Protocol V to the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons will also help reduce the number of civilian fatalities.

Furthermore, we encourage the National Unity Government to proceed with electoral reforms. For some months now, Afghanistan has had the necessary institutions in place for the holding of parliamentary and district council elections. A clear and realistic timetable is crucial for pushing through the remaining electoral reforms and for holding credible, fair, equal and free elections.

Let me conclude by reiterating Germany's full support for the crucial role played by UNAMA and United Nations agencies working in Afghanistan. As co-Chair of the International Contact Group on Afghanistan, Germany especially commends UNAMA's efforts to strengthen cohesion among international and regional stakeholders in Afghanistan. We look forward to receiving the results of the strategic review of the Mission requested by the Security Council. The review should be conducted with the aim of optimizing ongoing activities and strengthening the Mission even further. Germany remains committed to supporting Afghanistan, in close cooperation with the Afghan Government and our international partners.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Ms. Samson (Netherlands): I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to speak at today's debate on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union and joins others in thanking the Secretary-General for his detailed and thorough report (S/2017/508).

I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his dedicated work, and Ambassador Saikal for his statement.

Allow me to focus on three issues: the security situation and political stability in Afghanistan; reconciliation and meaningful participation by women in Afghan society; and the review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

First, the attack on the army base in Mazar-i-Sharif and the recent attacks in Kabul are a stark reminder of the suffering that the Afghan people and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces have had to endure in ever-greater numbers. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is deeply saddened by the loss of life. We express our condolences and support to all affected by such violence. In such challenging security conditions, good governance and political stability are essential for maintaining nationwide stability. We continue to stand with the National Unity Government in facing those challenges.

Secondly, in order to realize long-term stability in the region, peace talks remain an important objective. We join others in calling upon all parties involved to cooperate within the framework of an Afghan-led and

Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. The constructive engagement of regional partners is also of paramount importance.

During the Kabul process on 6 June, President Ghani Ahmadzai reaffirmed his commitment to the peace process and to the start of a national dialogue. The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes his strong personal commitment. We commend President Ghani Ahmadzai for his efforts to encourage the meaningful participation of women, civil society organizations and young Afghans in the process. If all Afghans are represented in the peace talks — formal or informal — sustainable peace can be reached.

However, there will be no peace in Afghanistan without the active participation of women. We applaud the results of the fourth Kabul National Symposium on Afghan Women, held on the theme "Afghan Women: Messengers of Peace" on 15 May. We commend the leadership of Afghanistan's First Lady, Rula Ghani, in her efforts to increase the political participation of women in Afghanistan by boosting the number of women taking part in provincial councils and provincial peace councils. We call upon the Afghan Government and all stakeholders involved to implement resolution 1325 (2000) as a matter of the utmost priority.

Thirdly, the Kingdom of the Netherlands strongly supports UNAMA's work in accordance with its current nationwide mandate. We would like to reiterate our appreciation for the implementation of the broad United Nations mandate throughout Afghanistan. UNAMA's regional presence is crucial for its success, and we emphasize the need for a strong regional United Nations presence throughout the country. We hope that the UNAMA review will support that notion and safeguard UNAMA's regional presence in Afghanistan.

We would like to underline the importance of UNAMA's role in regional political cooperation. We support UNAMA as it takes on a stronger role in such processes. We would also like to underscore our appreciation for UNAMA's thorough reporting on the human rights situation and on civilian casualties.

In conclusion, the international community should not waver and should remain fully committed to the situation in Afghanistan. UNAMA is a key partner in achieving long-term stability in Afghanistan. The Kingdom of the Netherlands remains dedicated to supporting Afghanistan throughout the transformation decade. During its membership of the Security Council in 2018, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to support Afghanistan with the same vision and commitment.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Mr. González de Linares Palou (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Believe me, Mr. President, when I say that I regret having yet again to begin a statement by expressing my delegation's consternation and deepest sympathy following the reprehensible terrorist attacks that have rocked Afghanistan in the past few weeks. Through the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, who is here with us today, I would like to convey our solidarity with the victims and our gratitude to, and support for, the Afghan Government in its resolute efforts to combat the scourge of terrorism.

Spain fully subscribes to the statement to be delivered shortly by the observer of the European Union, but I would also like to make a couple of comments in my national capacity.

I would first like to commend the Secretary-General for his recent trip to Kabul, just a few days ago, which once again served to emphasize the international community's strong support for Afghanistan and the solidarity of the States Members of the United Nations with the Afghan nation and its people.

The challenges facing Afghanistan right now are numerous and significant. They include maintaining security and combating terrorism and insurgency; effectively implementing the reform agenda and achieving sustained economic growth that has an impact on citizens' daily lives; preparing for the next elections and consolidating democracy and institutionality through an inclusive political process; managing the humanitarian crisis posed by the situation of internally displaced persons; and combating the festering wounds that drug production and trafficking have inflicted on the country's economy. While much progress has been made in the past few years, much remains to be done. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/508) and today's briefing by Ambassador Yamamoto, his Special Representative, show that the reality is far from positive. However, as the Secretary-General pointed out during his visit to Kabul, the resolute commitment of the citizens of Afghanistan to moving forward despite the difficulties is clear. The international community cannot be less stubborn.

I would like to emphasize Spain's support to the Afghan authorities in their determined efforts in all those areas, and at the same time to urge all political stakeholders to keep the progress and well-being of all Afghans at the forefront of their minds in order to ensure that it is that goal that ultimately guides their actions. I want to particularly encourage efforts to achieve reconciliation and support the quest for peace. When that goal is reached, while at the same time the achievements relating to respect for the rule of law and human rights and the equality of all Afghans are maintained, the other challenges I mentioned can be tackled in the full certainty of success. That peace, moreover, will redound positively to the benefit of the citizens of the entire region, not just of Afghanistan. We welcome the recent regional initiatives for peace and urge all actors in the region to commit unreservedly to supporting all efforts to end the conflict and achieve reconciliation.

I would like to conclude by reiterating Spain's firm and resolute support for the work of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and all the United Nations agencies and programmes that benefit Afghanistan and all Afghans. We await with great interest the results of the strategic review of the Mission, which is called on to contribute to the international effort in support of Afghanistan through better and more efficient use of available resources, while also strengthening Afghanistan's ownership of its own future.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's debate on the situation in Afghanistan. We also appreciate the briefing by Special Representative Yamamoto and the statement by Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, which have added to our understanding of the current crises in Afghanistan.

The recent flurry of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, including the massive Kabul bomb attack, have left many of us horror-struck. Clearly, in Afghanistan the international community is dealing with an adversary not averse to flagrantly violating international humanitarian law and human rights laws — an adversary flush with resources, weapons and operational support; an adversary with access to sanctuaries outside the sovereignty of Afghanistan and operational command of the international forces deployed there; an adversary that sees no reason or incentive to give up violence and participate in creation of a democratic, united, stable, secure and prosperous State. Unfortunately, the multiple crises that have been inflicted on this war-torn country have once again made Afghan territory attractive to criminal and terrorist groups that now appear to be well connected to international terror and crime networks that in turn prey on Afghanistan's resources. The situation is affecting security in South Asia, Central Asia and regions beyond.

More often than not, a crisis can be seen as a catalyst for real change and genuine solutions. However, for that to happen, our perceptions must be straight and forthright. After all, we cannot change what we cannot see, or what we are unwilling to see. For a long time, we believe, that has been the conundrum facing the international community in Afghanistan — that the international community's collective inability and unwillingness to see the problem for what it is has inflicted huge costs on the people of Afghanistan.

While no two conflicts are identical, one wonders why, despite the fact that we have witnessed the worst possible violence in Afghanistan, the Council does not think it appropriate to meet more often than in routine quarterly debates on the situation there. At times it has even shied away from condemning some of the terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. Is it that there are far too many to keep track of? Is it because there is a threshold below which human lives lost to terrorism are not required to be addressed?

We see a growing tendency to treat the violence in Afghanistan as routine. Brutality committed by terrorist and criminal networks are ignored, labelled as a product of anti-Government elements or the inevitable consequence of a civil and political conflict. In doing so we seem to be failing to ask some crucial questions. For example, where are those anti-Government elements getting their weapons, explosives, training and funding? Where do they find safe havens and sanctuary? How is it that they have resisted one of the biggest collective military efforts in the world? How is it that they collaborate with the world's most dreadful terrorists in killing and brutalizing Afghans? How is it that the phenomenal increase in opium production, accompanied by a rise in global narcotic prices, has been totally ignored by the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011)? Why is the 1988 sanctions regime still maintained when there is no effort

to use its leverage for progress in the peace process? Why do we hear nothing about the stalled peace process from those involved, or about the activities of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group? Why are we not hearing discussions in the Security Council about ideas and plans of action for a conflict that has left many Afghan lives shattered and brutalized?

In the past few months, the attacks on hospitals, schools, funerals, international development agencies and diplomatic missions seem to have been designed to send a message to a nation trying to stand on its feet. We salute the Afghan national security forces, which are doing their best to combat the forces of terrorism and extremism as they continue to strike, one after another. India remains committed to standing with Afghanistan and to supporting and strengthening its capabilities, not just for fighting terrorism and violence but also to assist it with development and nation-building. Our efforts to that end will be improved by the opening of a direct air corridor between our two countries, as agreed on between our two Heads of State in December. The first cargoes of goods arrived in both countries a few days ago, overcoming the obstructions that we have faced in connecting and trading directly with each other.

While we welcome the efforts to renew the United Nations approach to dealing with Afghanistan through the upcoming strategic review of UNAMA, such efforts should be guided by the needs and priorities of Afghanistan, its people and its Government. We would appreciate broader and more informal discussions on the matter with all important stakeholders.

In this regard, we must not differentiate between good and bad terrorists or play one group against the other. The Taliban, the Haggani Network, Al-Qaida, Da'esh, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and others of their ilk are all terror organizations, many of them proscribed by the United Nations. They should be treated like terrorist organizations, with no justifications offered for their activities.

India, for its part, will continue to stand, in the words of our Prime Minister, not behind but shoulder to shoulder with the democratically elected Government of Afghanistan as it battles terror and the multiple crises inflicted on it. We hope that the Council, which is tasked with the responsibility of maintaining international peace and security, will also play its role in restoring peace in Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): Let me begin by expressing my heartfelt condolences and condemnation in connection with the most recent terrorist attacks that took place during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in Kabul, which resulted in considerable damage to surrounding areas and some diplomatic facilities, including ours, as well as the attack on a Shia mosque on 15 June.

As the Secretary-General observed during his first visit to Kabul, peace remains the foundation for Afghanistan's sustainable development. At the same time, according to his report (S/2017/508), the security situation in Afghanistan remains extremely volatile, with 6,252 security-related incidents from 1 March to 31 May this year, a 2 per cent increase compared with last year. This is the highest total ever recorded for this period of time since 2001.

More than a decade after its invasion, Afghanistan, the region and the world are no safer. The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan has deep roots and cannot be addressed solely through military buildup. The Taliban, Da'esh and its offshoots, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant — Khorasan Province, continue their heinous attacks against the civilian population. They are reinforcing and recruiting, and continuing complex attacks such as those of 17 May and 31 May attacks, in Jalalabad and Kabul. The proliferation of terrorist groups on Afghan territory necessitates concerted international efforts on counter-terrorism. We need to deal with this increasing threat in a very comprehensive and resolute manner. The sustained support of the international community for the Afghan National Unity Government is more than ever necessary to help the Government in its fight against terrorism and extremism and those who have created and continue to support them.

Our support for the Afghan National Unity Government is unswerving. We welcome any achievement on the path to an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process leading to lasting and comprehensive peace in the country and the region. The progress achieved in the implementation of the peace agreement between the Government and Hizb-i Islami is an indication of the Government's will to establish peace.

Iran is indeed very eager to see a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan as its neighbour, as security in Afghanistan directly and indirectly affects security on our borders and in the region. It was in this context that Iran welcomed and participated in the conference hosted by the Russian Federation on 14 April in Moscow, as well as the Kabul process meeting hosted by the Afghan Government on 6 June.

The full text of my statement, dealing with regional economic cooperation, combating narcotic drugs and the problem of refugees, will be distributed.

Finally, we support the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) as well as United Nations agencies in their efforts to provide development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan through a genuine commitment by the United Nations to a sustained partnership with that country. We must utilize the UNAMA mandate and its good offices to strengthen national institutions and capacities in priority areas, as requested by the Government.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Ms. Adamson (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States.

The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I shall read out a shortened version of my statement; the full version of the text will be distributed.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2017/508). I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing.

First of all, I would like to express the EU's most sincere condolences to the Afghan people and Government for the recent horrific terrorist attacks in Kabul. At the same time, I would like to confirm the EU's unwavering engagement to stand by Afghanistan in the fight against the global threat of terrorism. At the same time, the EU calls for an in-depth investigation of these crimes and the identification of the perpetrators, who should be brought to justice.

As stated on several occasions, the EU strongly acknowledges the crucial role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people, encouraging peace and reconciliation, monitoring and promoting human rights, and coordinating the international community's assistance.

The Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, held in October last year, demonstrated a very strong international commitment to Afghanistan. At the conference, the international community sent a clear signal in support of peace, security and stability in Afghanistan. We should continue to build on this emerging consensus on regional and international support for the peace and reconciliation process. The EU stands ready to do its part in this political process.

All international efforts, whether they be security-related, political, economic, developmental or regional, should now be aligned to promote such a political process. Terrorism and violent extremism are fundamental threats to all State actors, undermining regional peace and stability.

The European Union remains fully committed to supporting an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. Such a process must include all Afghan men and women and their legitimate interests and must preserve Afghanistan's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as the equal rights of all Afghans under the Constitution of Afghanistan. We welcome the recently launched new regional peace initiative, the Kabul process on peace and security cooperation.

We welcome the undeterred willingness of the Afghan Government to engage in a political process with the Taliban and other Afghan groups opposing the Kabul Government to reach a lasting political settlement. We welcome all initiatives aimed at creating a conducive environment for such a process and call on all parties to engage in constructive solutions.

We also welcome the work that has been done by the Afghan Government to advance the implementation of its commitments and the progress achieved on anti-corruption, election preparation, revenue collection and budget execution. This must now be followed by further tangible results in the implementation of the reform agenda. On 18 February, the signature between

the EU and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan of their first contractual relationship, the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development, sent a strong political signal of the EU's enduring support for the country. We hope that Afghanistan can ratify the agreement soon, to start the provisional application and to set up the institutional structures.

The EU and its member States welcome the Government's efforts to move ahead with the delayed parliamentary and district council elections. We nevertheless note that the key decisions to start fully the electoral preparations are still pending. We urge the Government to take the necessary decisions promptly, and the electoral management bodies to implement the electoral process in a professional, transparent and inclusive manner. That will help in rebuilding public confidence. While technical aspects of elections play an important role, the political will of Afghan stakeholders and a strong and cohesive leadership are necessary to deliver credible elections. The EU supports the electoral process capacity-building and institutional strengthening of the electoral management bodies and UNAMA's coordinating role.

On behalf of the EU and its member States, I would like to reiterate that joint Statebuilding and development efforts in Afghanistan need to build on reinforced regional cooperation. Regional cooperation remains key to lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region. The treats of terrorism affecting all countries of the region can be confronted only with increased security cooperation. In the same vein, it is indispensable for sustainable development.

Migration continues to represent a common concern on which the dialogue between the EU and Afghanistan proceeds in a meaningful way. In the framework of the joint way forward, a political engagement to enhance cooperation on migration and re-admission, both sides have reaffirmed their commitment to deepen cooperation on the basis of solidarity and information-sharing.

At the same time, the EU monitors the Afghan refugees' regional dimension. We raise this issue continuously during our political dialogues with relevant partners. The EU supports a regional approach in dealing with this issue, and our actions focus on addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement. We also want to focus on the long-term reintegration of returned migrants. Let me reassure the Council that the EU will continue its work and engagement in these areas.

In that context, UNAMA should be encouraged to uphold its work and the dialogue with the Afghan Government on the inclusion of internally displaced persons and returnees. The EU aims to develop a comprehensive EU response to bridge the humanitarian-development nexus and promote durable solutions to the challenges posed by the protracted nature of the crisis.

Although UNAMA's 2017 first quarterly report on civilian casualties in Afghanistan documents a 4 per cent decrease in the number of civilian casualties compared to the same period in 2016, we are concerned by increases in both child and women civilian casualties. We call on all parties to do their utmost to protect the civilian population, especially women and children. We also need to continue to protect the vital role of humanitarian agencies and respect their impartiality and humanitarian space in addressing the most urgent needs of the vulnerable. In view of the threat posed by the many mines and improvised explosive devices to the population, the EU also encourages Afghanistan to maintain the current demining rhythm.

In conclusion, it is important that the international community remain strongly committed to support Afghanistan towards long-term stability. The EU continues to consider UNAMA as a key partner in achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan. UNAMA has an invaluable role in ensuring the broadest possible international support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. The EU will continue to support those efforts with all means at its disposal.

In that regard, I would like to inform colleagues that the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms. Federica Mogherini, has today announced the appointment of Mr. Roland Kobia as the Special Envoy of the European Union to Afghanistan. His main task will be to advance the EU's contribution to delivering lasting peace and prosperity in Afghanistan and the region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Bogaert (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his quarterly report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2017/508), as well as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his

briefing and his commitment in support of Afghanistan during this critical phase.

First of all, like those who have spoken before me, I wish to extend my deepest condolences to the Afghan people and the Government for the victims of the recent terrorist attacks in Kabul. Belgium will continue to stand firm with Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism.

We welcome the Secretary-General's recent visit to Afghanistan, which was an expression of international solidarity for Afghanistan and reflects the continuing international commitment to the lasting and peaceful stabilization of the country. We fully support the messages and appeals of the Secretary-General, as well as those of his Special Representative, with respect to preparations for the elections, the importance of an Afghan-led peace process, the need for a concerted international effort against terrorism and the need to successfully integrate a significant number of returnees. Those are key elements for the transition to succeed and overcome the very real challenges and risks.

On its part, Belgium remains committed to contributing to international community efforts in support of Afghanistan. In particular, we wish to salute the Afghan Government for launching the Kabul process. We are also pleased at the announcement just made as to the imminent announcement concerning the date of parliamentary elections.

I would like to focus my remarks today on three points.

First of all, we stress the importance of lasting action against landmines in Afghanistan. Last week, Mr. President, you organized an important briefing on mine action in the Security Council (see S/PV.7966). Despite the enormous efforts undertaken by the Afghan Government, with the support of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and other international partners, Afghanistan remains one of the countries in the world most affected by this scourge. Anti-personnel mines, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war cause countless civilian casualties and disproportionately affect children.

More than 80 per cent of victims of unexploded ordnance are children. The challenge facing Afghanistan in terms of achieving its mine-clearance obligations under the Ottawa Convention by 2023 is a substantial one. I am pleased to announce that Belgium recently decided to support a new UNMAS project to strengthen the capacity of the Afghan National Mine Action Authority to coordinate and manage the quality of all mine action activities in the country.

Secondly, I would like to express our deep concern about the increased impact of conflict on children. During the first quarter of 2017, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) unfortunately documented a sharp increase in the number of child victims. While anti-Government forces are responsible for the vast majority of recruitment into armed groups, torture and other violations against children, we also call on the Government to step up its efforts to implement its commitments.

UNAMA reported progress with respect to detention practices concerning children, but it is still important to fully implement the directives issued by the National Security Directorate. Too many schools continued to be used for military purposes. We call on the Secretary-General to maintain a special child-protection unit within UNAMA. We also wish to reiterate our call on all parties to the conflict to fully respect their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, and lastly, it is clear that the national peace process and concerted action at the regional and international levels, including the recently launched Kabul process, are essential to make meaningful progress in the fight against terrorism. I would also like to reiterate the importance of a comprehensive national plan of action against violent extremism in order to effectively combat terrorism. Ground-level understanding of the factors influencing radicalization and recruitment, as well as an adequate understanding of terrorist financing networks and religious dialogue, are key elements for effective action. Belgium commends the Government of Afghanistan for its significant efforts to date, such as the action plan to combat the financing of terrorism. Several speakers mentioned drug trafficking, which plays a significant role in that regard. Belgium encourages the Government to continue to work on a national plan of action, while taking advantage of the support and expertise of the United Nations in that area.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): At the outset, Australia joins others in strongly condemning the horrific bombing in Kabul on 31 May — a shocking attack to take place

during the holy month of Ramadan. In a letter of condolence to President Ghani Ahmadzai and in his remarks to the Australian Parliament, Prime Minister Turnbull restated Australia's commitment to supporting Afghanistan in its fight against terrorism and its long-term security and development.

Attacks like those only strengthen our resolve to stand with the Afghan people to achieve peace and prosperity. We stand with the National Unity Government as it pursues unity and stability for Afghanistan's future. We urge the people of Afghanistan to maintain solidarity despite their frustration and suffering, and commend the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in encouraging political dialogue through the use of its good offices in Kabul.

The events of the last quarter underline the ongoing need for the international community as a whole to stand with Afghanistan as it works to end the cycle of violence. To that end, Australia recently announced an increase to its military commitment in Afghanistan to approximately 300 personnel so as to support the development of the long-term capabilities of Afghanistan's security forces. That important work is part of our broader commitment to Afghanistan's governance and reform agenda, because securing a future for Afghanistan is not just about security.

We commend Afghanistan's commitment to implementing reform and note the important progress achieved, including improved projections for economic growth this year. The revised penal code and anti-corruption initiatives are commendable achievements in connection with governance and the rule of law. Positive steps on human rights, particularly withdrawing the reservation to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment are also welcome. To build on that progress, we urge sustained momentum on electoral reform as a critical building block for democratic progress. We were encouraged to hear here today that an announcement on a date for delayed parliamentary elections may be imminent.

We also congratulate Afghanistan on inaugurating the Kabul process initiative. Afghanistan's ownership of the regional discussion about sustainable peace demonstrates a commitment to seek fresh, smart and practical ideas on how stability can be achieved. We encourage Afghanistan's neighbours and partners to join with the National Unity Government in that effort. We welcome the recent constructive engagement between Prime Minister Sharif and President Ghani Ahmadzai. The international community stands with Afghanistan and is ready to support Kabul as it leads on finding solutions to Afghanistan's challenges.

In conclusion, Afghanistan remains at the forefront of global counter-terrorism efforts. Recent events in London, Manchester, Tehran, Egypt and Afghanistan itself serve to underline the potential consequences of failure. Afghanistan remains an urgent priority for regional and international security, and it remains essential that we act together in support.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Ms. Boucher (Canada): I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to address the Security Council. I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his insightful briefing.

I would like to begin by offering my sincere condolences to the Government and the people of Afghanistan affected by ongoing terrorist attacks, including the bombing in Kabul on 31 May. It is crucial for us to continue our efforts to counter terrorism and all forms of violent extremism.

I would also like to congratulate the Afghan Government on convening the Kabul process for peace and security cooperation conference on 6 June, despite extremely challenging circumstances. Canada fully supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. It is my hope that the Kabul process will bear fruit and that Afghanistan will soon be free of such violence.

Canada remains committed to supporting Afghanistan on its path towards development. In line with our recently announced feminist international assistance policy, we will continue to focus on women's and girls' rights in all of our programming in Afghanistan. For example, we actively support women's inclusion and empowerment in Afghanistan. We provide assistance to help implement the law on the elimination of violence against women and offer programmes that provide education, awareness-raising and capacity-building on women's rights and gender-based violence. Our partners also help women assume greater decision-making roles in their households

and communities and build their livelihood skills and capacities. For peace, security and development to take root and endure in Afghanistan, women must join men at the centre of decision-making at all levels in Afghan politics, society and the economy.

Canada commends the Afghan Government for pledging to increase the presence of women in Government institutions to 30 per cent by 2020. Canada also commends the Afghan Government for launching its national action plan to eliminate early and child marriages. On 15 May, Canada joined women from across Afghanistan who gathered to discuss their experiences, vision and contributions to peace at the fourth Kabul Symposium, held on the theme "Afghan Women: Messengers of Peace". Women's participation in the peace and reconciliation process is essential. I hope that events such as that, along with efforts to alleviate gender-based violence and provide more education to girls and young women, will push Afghanistan closer to peace and stability.

(*spoke in French*)

Allow me to express my deep concern about the continuing deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan, in particular with regard to the number of casualties among civilian and aid workers reported thus far for 2017. We are troubled by the number civilian casualties. Their displacement, increased vulnerability and losses are unacceptable. We are dismayed by the impact of instability and insecurity on women and children. All parties to the conflict must take urgent steps to end the killing and wounding of civilians. We call on Afghanistan's neighbours and partners to continue to work with the Government of Afghanistan to increase regional stability and decrease violence within the country.

Canada supports the Afghan people in their efforts to ensure a more secure, prosperous and peaceful future.

The meeting rose at 1.35 p.m.